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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

TEACHERS DEVELOPING:
EXPLORING THE MEANING OF CHANGE THROUGH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

by

Ⓒ DONNA MAY MORRISON

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Edmonton, Alberta
FALL, 1993

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Date: Sept. 1, 1993

DEDICATION

To my grandchildren,

Kelsey, Dylan, Brynn

and those yet to be....

With the hope that their teachers will always appreciate their curiosity and believe in their unique ability to learn

ABSTRACT

This two year study explores the meaning of change as teachers experiment with innovative ideas and strive to make them an integral part of their belief systems and practices. The framework that guides the study presents change as a dynamic and individual process created through personal experience and social interaction. It recognizes that teachers can develop through collaborative and reflective professional learning experiences. The teacher research employs a constructivist perspective and uses a narrative approach. It primarily focuses on three teachers from grades one, two and three classrooms in different schools, but also includes the story of a fourth teacher who chooses not to complete the study. The researcher is actively involved in the study as a responsive facilitator and storyteller. Through conversation and journalling all those involved share pedagogical and personal stories and anecdotes that construct their knowing, being, and teaching.

The researcher and teacher participants begin the change process through involvement in a professional learning experience on the Project Approach. This pedagogical approach demonstrates an application of the principles of the Alberta Education initiative called Program Continuity. The resulting stories of project work in each of the teacher's classrooms are composed of their initial experiences as well as subsequent interpretations by both the researcher and the teachers. These classroom narratives and dialogues reveal individual circumstances, reflect unique understandings, celebrate diversity, and demonstrate that meaningful professional learning can contribute to educational and personal change as teachers reflect on existing practice.

Four themes emerge from the narrative data and support the notion that enduring change which profoundly affects one's pedagogical beliefs requires individuals to be actively and mindfully engaged in experiential exploration. The research suggests that genuine change is created by authentic, empowered, flexible, and insightful individuals as they search for deeper understandings and make personal connections to construct new meanings. The study further examines the pragmatic realities of creating change within an entrenched positivist milieu. It challenges individual teachers to take responsibility for their own professional learning and promotes real change as a possibility within caring communities of learners and leaders. Interdependent teachers, working within collegial schools, can make changes which will more effectively serve the children of the both the present and the future. As teachers voice personal visions they better understand their own developing ideas and feelings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to the participating teachers - Ashley, Brad, and Rachael. Without these committed teachers my work would not have been possible. Their dedication to their own professional learning permitted me to undertake and complete the research study. I also thank Marie for contributing everything that she could to this effort.

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CHAPTER I

BEGINNING THE NARRATIVE JOURNEY

Toward a Personal Understanding of Professional Learning

One of the constants of a life in the field of education is the inevitability of change. Some changes are mandated by policy, other changes are inspired by dynamic presenters, and still others occur slowly and naturally over time. While all of these kinds of change have dominated my professional learning, I often question the extent to which such changes have contributed to the effectiveness of my professional practice and to the strength of my educational beliefs.

As I began a teaching career in the newly established Early Childhood Services (ECS) program at its inception in 1973, the development of a parent involvement program was a mandated requirement that was absent from my teaching practice. However, it was a required change that I embraced unconditionally after attending a professional development workshop in which the presenter passionately presented the many benefits that would result from the active participation of parents in the early education of their children. As my colleagues and I left the in-service activity, I was exhilarated by the possibilities and could hardly contain my enthusiasm. To my amazement, my fellow teachers were less than enthusiastic. A former elementary school teaching colleague reminded me that we had previously promoted a position separating *us*, as professionals, from *them*, as parents. She felt that it would be next to impossible to remove the barrier we had created. She went on to quote my words, spoken earlier when I was a private kindergarten teacher: "I don't require parents to help me out at kindergarten when they are paying a monthly fee to have a professional meet their children's needs." Another workshop participant berated the "theoretical nonsense" of the presenter as "just another idealistic idea that will never sell in our community." And so the discussion continued.

As I listened to further criticisms about the irrelevance of the in-service presentation, the impracticability of the suggestions presented by the ECS consultant, and the waste of our time as professionals, I was distressed and confused by the contradictions. While my colleagues and I heard the same message, we certainly experienced it very differently, and in subsequent years we structured our programs of parent involvement in a variety of ways. My colleagues and I did eventually accept parent involvement as an integral part of our ECS programs; however, the stories of the way in which each of us chose to involve parents are as diverse as are the resulting changes to both our professional and personal lives as we interacted with these parents over the years.

Because any shared professional development experience can be individually interpreted from "multiple realities" (Schutz, 1962), verbal exchanges like the one above typically debrief teachers after each staff development activity. The reasons for these diverse opinions involve a complex set of interdependent and interrelated social conditions that influence the ways in which the participants react to the situation. This phenomenon presents problems for those who initiate and deliberately plan for the delivery of innovative ideas to teachers. Those who strive to improve education for the children in our schools must deal with the multi-dimensional nature of change. This process of altering, modifying, or transforming the practices and beliefs of teachers, while also recognizing that it may entail termination, growth, substitution, replacement, or simply passing from one phase to another, is not an easy task.

The issues involved in promoting educational change are contentious, as the need to participate in the process, as well as the value of recommended changes, are often vehemently resisted by both individual teachers and whole schools. I have always found it difficult to know when to reject certain change possibilities, when and how to put others into practice, and in what ways to cope with mandated changes over which I had very little control. Fullan (1982) believes the key both to understanding the worth of a particular change, and to achieving this desired change, concerns the problem of meaning. He states that what we need is "a more coherent picture that people who are involved in or affected by educational change can use to make sense of what they and others are doing" (p. 4). As educational leaders and practitioners, we must find subjective meaning concerning what should change, as well as how to go about it, whether the changes are prescribed by those outside the system, advocated within the school, or developed by individual teachers. If the efforts of planned change are to result in improved pedagogy, educators at all levels need to be cognizant of both the general and detailed knowledge of change, and of the politics, personalities, and history specific to the individuals involved and the educational setting in which it is occurring.

These intricacies of the change process became clearer to me when my position as an ECS teacher was expanded to include the coordination of ECS programs for the school division. My new personnel responsibilities included the selection, supervision, and evaluation of early childhood teachers, and I actively promoted an experiential, play-based philosophy to other teachers through the provision of a variety of professional development experiences. In the dual role of teacher/administrator, I attended many professional development workshops and zealously shared the new ideas with my colleagues. I felt each new experience provided me with an opportunity to grow professionally, as I integrated new learnings with previous ones, all the time redefining and refining my practice, coming to a deeper understanding of who I was as a teacher. Surely it must also be so for my colleagues!

Not to be disillusioned when I discovered this process happens very differently for all people, I continued enthusiastically to present in-service workshops to ECS teachers. While I was now more aware that not everyone shared my excitement for new projects, I optimistically believed that these new ideas would gradually lead to more significant learning for children.

One common theme through many of these professional development workshops I presented was "learning through play." One time, after attending a "Math Their Way" seminar, I outlined the key principles and spoke of my personal satisfaction when I observed the children actively engaged in discovering the patterns and complexities of their world through involvement with these new materials and strategies. I was later amazed to see how the concept of playing with manipulative materials had been interpreted by my fellow ECS teachers. One teacher had rigorously "implemented" the program as outlined in the teacher's guidebook; another teacher completely rejected the methods as too demanding and the materials as too time consuming to prepare; others had adopted different components of the program and integrated these ideas into their existing play programs. During these visits to their classrooms, the teachers and I further discussed the issues. What were the potential learnings when "math tubs" are introduced into the play environment? As we contemplated the answers to such questions in our conversations, the teachers began to rethink original positions and developed new insight. Upon returning to my classroom, I inevitably made changes to the play experiences that I was providing for my students, thus reflecting the insight I had gained through interactions with my colleagues.

For me, the reciprocal gains from interpersonal interactions regarding professional issues is evident, but the process through which such gains can be accomplished with all teachers in a school system is unclear and often unsuccessful. Too often I failed to heed the words of Calderhead (1987) who says, "Curriculum innovation and professional development have to take into account the context that has shaped existing practice" (p. 17). Perhaps I was too often insensitive toward the background experiences of those participating in professional development activities. In addition, when teachers returned to the classroom after in-service experiences, I did not always value the active choices they made about whether or not to use the proposed strategies. Thus, I failed to recognize that teachers all make sense of new ideas in different ways, based on their unique professional and personal needs, abilities, and interests. Furthermore, I could have been more aware that teachers also have different perspectives on what constitutes success or failure in a particular situation and this, too, influences self-assessment of professional learning.

Individuals learn from reflecting on mistakes as well as from exploring successes, and I am no exception. As a result of my personal experiences, I agree with Fullan (1982) when he outlines what he believes is the main reason for failure of planned change efforts: "The developers went through a process of acquiring their meaning of the new curriculum and once it was presented to teachers, there was no provision for allowing them to work out the meaning for themselves of the changes before them" (p. 103). I realize that all too often I was guilty of this omission as I failed to combine good innovative ideas with consistent follow-up support systems matched to the individuals with whom I was working.

Current research confirms the fact that most in-service or professional development attempts fail (Lambert, 1989; Lieberman, 1990). A variety of reasons are provided, including the views that they are ad hoc, discontinuous and unconnected to any plan for change which addresses the set of factors identified in understanding the meaning of change, and also that they ignore the realities of everyday work of teachers in the classrooms and administrators in the schools (Fullan, 1982). Of all the planned changed efforts, the "one-shot" in-service workshop appears to be the most negatively perceived both in the research literature and by the teachers in the field. Paradoxically, the workshop approach is still the most commonly used and widely accepted method of in-service and professional development by teachers and staff development planners. Joyce & Showers (1980) are amazed at how often teachers plan one-shot workshops, even though they complain about them when they are provided by others. I believe this phenomenon may result from the feeling of isolation that teachers in classroom experience as they spend their days with young children, with little opportunity for adult conversation. Participation with their colleagues in interactive professional development workshops is a practical means by which this need can be realized.

Lieberman (1990) offers her perspective on the issue as she recognizes that, while many programs and curricular innovations have encountered difficulties, others have succeeded in engaging and exciting teachers, sparking their participation in changing curriculum and pedagogy. She continues by citing some successful programs which have linked content and pedagogy, and have emphasized sensitivity to the classroom context, teachers' experiential learning, and the necessity for organizational supports to initiate and maintain the process of change. Lieberman identifies the best of these programs as having a unifying philosophy and a strong set of values that underlie the activities and guide the teachers' interactions with their students.

As progressive ideas are introduced to today's teachers, the learning potential for the children in our schools can be improved and, along with contemporary educational critics (Goodlad, 1984; Elkind, 1988; Katz, 1988; Eisner, 1985a, 1985b; Barth, 1990; Glickman, 1990, 1992; Lieberman, 1990; Pignatelli & Pflaum, 1993; Jones, 1993), I believe changes are necessary. The following comment by Fullan in 1982 is still relevant today: "The fact remains that innovative teaching practices aimed at the higher-order cognitive skills (decision making, problem solving, inquiry learning) and personal and social skills (communication skills, ability to work in groups, multicultural understanding, attitudes and skills in preparation for the job market) have not been implemented despite their endorsement in national, regional, and local policy statements" (p. 116). In his updated book, The New Meaning of Educational Change, (1991) Fullan expresses increased determination to improve educational experiences as he focuses on educational change which will result in "heightened interest and engagement" for students. The debate rages as to why innovations emphasizing these aims have not been widely endorsed by teachers; however, perhaps a more productive task is to concentrate on how we can encourage teachers to make the necessary changes by challenging them to become more thoughtful about what they are doing and why they are doing it.

In my current position as a college instructor in an Early Childhood Development Department, I continue to reflect on the meaning of my pedagogical experience as I present ideas on such topics as "learning through play" to students, teachers, and caregivers. However, in revisiting my initial ideas about the value of play, I see that my personal beliefs about the ways in which we as adults can best promote meaningful learning, continue to evolve and change. My knowledge about children's play has been constructed through my life experiences - exploring memories of childhood play, participating in the play of children, observing children at play, reflecting on presentations linking play theory and play practice, interacting with the print of play theorists, as well as joining in stimulating conversations with colleagues, university professors, students, and parents. Through interactions with others, such knowledge is "socially constructed" (Berger & Luckman, 1966); however, the meaning we make of these concepts is in constant flux as together we continue to construct and reconstruct new understandings in the "common sense world" (Schutz, 1962).

Educational change is a theme that runs through my personal and professional life as I concomitantly search for a deeper understanding of the meaning of change within the context of my career, and strive to gain insights into professional development experiences for others. It has always been, and will continue to be, my personal challenge to be more aware of divergent human values, thus recognizing how "multiple perspectives" (Bruner, 1986) on the meaning of life and education can exist and flourish within a supportive and caring environment. Throughout my research journey I have supported teachers in their personal quests to make meaning of the changes in which they are involved. The words of Fullan (1982) guide me in this process:

> Change is full of paradoxes. Being deeply committed to a particular change in itself provides no guidelines for attaining it, and may blind us to the realities of others which would be necessary for transforming and implementing the change effectively. Having no vision at all is what makes for educational bandwagons. In the final analysis, either we have to give up and admit that effective educational change is impossible, or we have to take our best knowledge and attempt to improve our efforts. (p. 89)

The Research Topic

This is a story about change, about teachers developing. It tells of the teaching experiences of four early childhood teachers. Ashley teaches in a grade three classroom and Rachael teaches grade two students. Brad, who was teaching grade one last year when the study began, is now teaching in a grade three classroom. It also contains Marie's story, an elementary school teacher who did not complete the study, but was initially part of the research group. It focuses on how these teachers made sense of an innovative educational approach and, because I acted as a facilitator to help them make sense of their practice, it is also my story as a collaborative researcher.

As the teachers and I discussed issues through our conversations and dialogue journalling, I was sensitive to their individual perspectives, also recognizing the need to authentically present my personal perspective in an unobtrusive manner. Within the context of this mutually supportive social environment, I developed the guidelines that framed my research inquiry, informed my methodologies, and interpreted my research findings.

This study arises from the need to better understand the process through which particular teachers deal with educational change. Thus, I investigated the "meaning of professional learning" for these teachers. Throughout the research study I explored the question: *How do new pedagogical practices move from fleeting, superficially implemented* *experiments to become an integral part of the teacher's belief system and practice?*

Three of these teachers began their journey, as did I, with an intensive in-service workshop on the "Project Approach" (Katz & Chard, 1989). The fourth research participant studied the same approach in a university graduate course. Following these initial professional development experiences, we shared everyday experiences as the teachers reflected upon the pedagogical and personal anecdotes and stories that constructed their ways of knowing, being, and teaching. My purpose in writing the research story is to show others how the teachers in this study view professional development opportunities; how they use the new ideas of others upon returning to the classroom; and how their pedagogy and beliefs develop as they become more "reflective practitioners" (Schon, 1987). In addition, I will uncover some of the conditions which may impede the change process within individual teachers. Readers may also identify with these teachers and thus gain a deeper personal understanding of professional learning.

CHAPTER II

REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

> No one can make you change. No one can stop you from changing. No one really knows how you must change. Not even you. Not until you start!
>
> David Viscott, 1977, p. 136

Introduction

Since my readers' ability to hear what I say may be affected by the sort of person they perceive me to be, it was my intention in the first chapter to introduce myself, as well as my research topic, As I discussed real-life experiences, I interchangeably used different words we hear in the everyday language of practicing teachers as they discuss their professional learning. In so doing, I ascribed much the same meaning to a variety of different terms - "professional development," "staff development," "in-service activities." In order to be clearer about the meanings of these, and other related words, I begin this chapter by looking to the literature for definitions and explanations of these often confused and misunderstood terms. I will continue by exploring various views of how the concept of change is related to issues of teachers' learning experiences; examine approaches and models that grow from these views; provide additional insight with a section that focuses on how teachers develop as individuals through participation in professional learning experiences, and end with personal thoughts that form the foundation upon which my study is based.

Understanding Terms Associated with Professional Learning

I begin with a view of "professional learning" simply defined as "continuing teacher education following licensure and employment" (St. Maurice, 1990, p. 15). However, under the umbrella of this generic term, there appears to be little consensus in the literature on the terminology used in discussing issues of professional learning, nor does there seem to be agreement on the meaning of the terms. Therefore, it is beneficial to interpret the meaning of the words from the perspective of "ordinary language" (Austin, 1970). Austin states: "When we examine what we should say when, what words we should use in what situations, we are looking again not *merely* at words (or 'meanings', whatever they may be) but also at the realities we use the words to talk about: we are using a sharpening awareness of words to sharpen our perception of, though not as the final arbiter of, the phenomena" (p. 182).

Pajares (1992) presents a similar point of view as he says: "All words begin as servants, eager to oblige and assume whatever function may be assigned them, but, that accomplished, they become masters, imposing the will of their predefined intention and dominating the essence of human discourse. It is for this reason that articulate conversation must demand not only clarity of thought and expression but also preciseness of word choice and meaning" (p. 308). St. Maurice (1990) states: "Recent rhetorical studies stress the particular circumstances under which language is produced, and access the effectiveness of language by the strength and nature of its impact upon the settings, not according to *a priori* general principles" (p. 15). A look at the underlying meanings associated with "professional learning words" emphasize the different perspectives expressed by those who use the terms *in-service education, staff development, staff renewal, innovation, teacher growth*, or *teacher development.*

Thompson (1985) provides an insightful discussion of this dilemma as she attempts to define "in-service education" and concludes it is an impossible and unnecessary task. She further suggests that "most people are satisfied with their understanding of what in-service education is - what it is supposed to do, what its assumptions are, and how it operates" (p. 2). She cites the work of Polanyi (1969), who believes we know more than we can say and that we may know or recognize something without being able to describe it. Thompson feels the only common agreement possible may be that such educational endeavors "include enrichment activities undertaken by educational personnel after completion of their basic training" (p. 2). She proposes that one's choice of words depends upon one's view of teaching and hypothesizes: "Those who aim toward achieving wider acceptance of teaching as a profession tend to favor 'professional development'. Those who have a union orientation may prefer 'personnel' to 'professional'. Administrators are often concerned with 'staff development" (p. 3). By further exploring the terms from this perspective, the premises underlying the beliefs become clearer, and the meanings can be better understood.

Kostelnik, Soderman & Whiren (1993) state: "*Innovation* refers to any significant shift in philosophy, process, or aim taken by an individual or group of persons working together" (p. 428). Rudduck (1991) seeks to make a distinction between "innovation" and "development." She says: "Development rests on small change events, none of which is threatening in itself to the whole structure; on the contrary, each event, though it acts as a minute impulse for change, confirms the known past" (p. 56). In her view, innovation is different in that it is "conscious, planned, and involves some fundamental breaks with the known past", thus involving a "substantial shift from the pattern of their present practices" (p. 56). She notes that "planned change" is a term often used in curriculum discussions. Formerly it was "a phrase that usually signified that the change in question was someone else's idea," but today, in an era of school-based curriculum development, it is more likely to mean "planned by teachers in a particular school" (p. 69).

While many people use the term, "staff development," their focuses are somewhat different. Fullan (1987) has a broad and inclusive perspective; thus, he says staff development is "central to every approach to educational improvement: performance appraisal, effective schools, planned change, school improvement, curriculum implementation, role of the principal," and also as ongoing, interactive, cumulative learning "involving a variety of learning formats and learning partners" (p. 215). In the edited book by Wideen & Andrews (1987), each of the contributors writes about "staff development," but in a slightly different way. For example, Stake, Shapson, & Russell use the term and define it as "the aggregate of what individual practitioners (including administrators, coordinators and others) do to overcome weaknesses and pursue new interests" (p. 197). Griffin (1987), another contributer to this book, says staff development **is** school improvement. Griffin (1983) also says that staff development programs are designed to "alter the professional practices, beliefs, and understanding of school persons toward an articulated end" (p. 33).

" INSET" (in-service education and training) is a commonly used term in Great Britain and refers to planned activities practiced both within and outside schools primarily to develop professional knowledge, skills, attitudes and performances of the professional staff in schools. Oldroyd & Hall (1991) say "staff development is the part of INSET that aims to promote development FOR performance (training) and OF performance (support on the job)" (p. 3). By promoting these aims, staff development is less about development of the professional than about development of the school.

Staff development is linked to school improvement and change in many of the explanations. Guskey (1986) recognizes the importance of improving practices, as he defines staff development as a "systematic attempt to bring about change - change in the classroom practices of teachers, changes in their beliefs and attitudes, and change in the learning outcomes of students" (p. 5). Heideman (1990) agrees and says "staff development offers a process of growth to all professional educators. It is designed to influence their knowledge, attitudes or skills, thus enabling them to create educational concepts and design instructional progress to improve student learning" (p. 4). However, she also states that these programs should be based on "needs identified at the local, state, national, or global level - often the result of social change" (p.4). Reyers presents a similar comprehensive approach to school improvement as he says both teachers and administrators must totally commit themselves to staff development, which he defines as a program designed "to build a culture of school effectiveness in which authority and power is shared by all" (Burke, Heideman & Heideman, 1990, p. 53).

While the Ford Foundation Report (Academy for Educational Development, 1985) also has improvement as a key concept in its perspective, the authors prefer the term "teacher development" and identify it as ongoing educational training that enables "teachers to reflect upon their classroom experiences, to question, to explore, and test their pedagogy, and to take steps individually and collectively to improve teaching practices" (p. 7). Similarly, Lieberman & Miller (1992) strongly advocate using "teacher development" and clearly distinguish it from competing notions of staff development and in-service education. Their unique definition of teacher development is "professional growth activities - continuous inquiry into practice" (p. 105). To them, teacher development is not only the renewal of teaching, but also the renewal of the school. Their challenging approach defines teacher development as "culture building" (p. 106). Heideman (1990) agrees and, although she uses the term staff development, she has an equally integrated view, stating "staff development is concerned with personal as well as professional and organizational needs" (p. 4).

Diamond (1991) uses many different terms to refer to professional learning; however, when he refers to "in-service teacher education" he says it "may be described very pragmatically and typically as any activity, usually deliberate and formalized, whereby teachers working beyond pre-service years may upgrade their professional understanding, skills and attitudes to broaden their perspectives" (p. 46). Wade (1984/85) believes the terms "in-service education" and "staff development" can be "used interchangeably to mean any training activity designed to increase the competencies needed by teachers in the performance of their assigned responsibilities" (p. 54). Heideman (1990) disagrees and states that these are not synonymous terms. She says in-service education is only one part of staff development being almost exclusively informational in nature. Liebermann & Miller (1992) concur and believe that in-service education is synonymous with training and therefore implies a deficit model.

Plooij (1991) also believes this in-service model of "performity" has often been "the quick-fix, tell-them-what-they-should-do, brand of training" whose goal is "the quickest way of doing something with the least energy" (p. 13). Howey, Bents, & Corrigan (1980) criticize traditional in-service education and state it is viewed as "an activity which follows a full-day's work, in a setting apart from their own instruction, with no attempt made at any time to pursue the subject matter, whatever it may be, into the teacher's classroom" (p. 7). McDonnell & Christensen (1990) are even more scathing in their attack on in-service education, saying it "has been a laughing stock among teachers - a subject for derision and jokes. At best it has been benign; at worst it has been seen as an impediment to the teacher's fundamental task of being alone in classrooms preparing for their students" (Burke, Heideman, & Heiedeman, 1990, p. 120).

Contemporary literature also offers some interesting perspectives on the meaning of "professionalism" and the term "professional development." Levine (1992) states that a profession is defined by "a knowledge base, a moral framework, and a collegial structure" (p. 13). In discussing "teacher professionalism," Fullan (1993) says we need to look at a new paradigm which "synthesizes the forces of moral purpose and change agentry" (p. 17). Lally, Knutton, Windale & Henderson (1992) say teaching, as a profession, is a "rational, practical, reflective, and human activity in which teachers must be empowered to exercise their own educational values in making decisions about classroom practice" (p. 124).

In a discussion addressing teacher professionalism, Cuban says "teaching requires making concrete choices among competing values for vulnerable others" (Jones, 1993, p. 147). Houston (1992) states: "teaching as a profession is simultaneously an art, a science, and 'a calling' whose mysteries each person must enter by himself or herself" (p. 128). Dean (1991) more pragmatically defines a "profession" as an "occupation which requires long training, involves theory as a background to practice, has its own code of behavior, and a high degree of autonomy" (p. 5). Therefore, she sees "professional development" as offering something to society, to the pupils, and to the teacher. She says it "is career long, starting with initial training and continuing until retirement. It is an active process" (p. 7).

Buzzing (1992) extends Dean's view as she says "professional development" means "enabling individuals to have the problem-solving, innovative skills to cope with new skills as they arise" (p. 32). Yonemura (1986) combines personal and professional development, saying they are both "contingent upon opportunities to act autonomously and to use initiative, not to be directed and managed as pawns" (p. 144). Positive images are created by using words like "development" and "growth;" Kagan substitutes the word "growth" for "development" as she says "professional growth" involves "changes over time in the behavior, knowledge, images, beliefs, or perceptions of teachers" (Grossman, 1992a, p. 172). It is interesting to observe the focus on the aspect of "personal choice" in these definitions of professionalism and the emphasis on learning as being part of a developmental process occurring over time.

It appears that those who wish to change attitudes toward professional learning separate the terms and develop specific definitions for each, in an attempt to remove misconceptions and negative connotations (Alberta Teachers Association, 1990a). Burbach (1992) extends this perspective as he points out that "most definitions speak to the need to make better or improve by removing faults, defects, or abuses and of the need to correct that which is corrupt or evil." He believes we "need to search for less incriminating symbols than *reform* to give a more positive tone to the call for change" (p. 31). Lambert (1989) also supports these views, as she suggests "in-service" in the 70s gave way to "staff development" in the 80s; however, she claims the 90s represent a new era of staff development which encompass a broad range of professional growth opportunities in which teachers are challenged to inquire, criticize, participate, or create. Fullan (1991) is somewhat more skeptical about the current state of affairs as he cynically comments: "Ten years ago we 'studied innovations'; today we are 'doing reform'' (p. xiii).

Originally, I used the term "professional learning" in a holistic sense, with little explanation. I've organized the resulting chaos through an exploration of related terms and their more specific meanings, thus providing deeper insights into the concept of career-long teacher learning. I prefer an inclusive perspective of professional learning for teachers, incorporating a variety of the components identified in this section. Therefore, it can be defined as a process which fosters both personal and professional growth in the individual teacher within a respectful and supportive social climate having as its ultimate aim, more effective learning for students and the continuous responsibility of self-renewal for educators and schools. While such a comprehensive viewpoint is important to allow individuals to move beyond the confusion of limited understandings of particular terms, it is also necessary to have a basic understanding of the specific conditions that influence one's choice of words in discussions about the education of practising teachers. The general and specific perspectives are equally important filters through which the reader can view the literature presented in the next section.

Change and Professional Learning

Change is, essentially, a neutral term. Burke (1990) states: "To make changes in the process of staff development and in the programs themselves become positive changes will take careful study and practice" (p. 214). In the literature discussing professional learning, there are opposing points of view toward educational change. Winstead (1982) represents one position as he supports the view that planned change is a deliberate process designed to solve a problem or to improve a condition and a "consistent approach in which no phase of development can be left to chance, impulse, or coercion" (p. 24). The alternate view is reflected in a definition of change put forward by Lally, et al. (1992), which states: "Change is a subjective, inter-personal and negotiable process and its value must be constructed and debated by those directly involved" (p. 125). While both scholars recognize that change is a process, it appears that Winstead holds the view that effective educational change must be rationally planned and implemented, and Lally and associates are of the opinion that changes in teaching occur naturally as a subjective phenomenon. Gordon (1992) juxtaposes these two perspectives by labelling the first approach "mechanical" and the alternate one "organic." In his view, the first perspective, in which the planning process is seen as an administrative set of discrete, linear components, is clearly inferior to the organic view, whose metaphor is growth and the development of a complex human organism in a practical sense.

While these perspectives promote polarized positions, perhaps there is something to be learned from exploring aspects from each point of view and considering how they can exist side by side. In examining the literature dealing with this topic, I will keep in mind Aoki's (1983) perspective, as he cautions against the adoption of an either-or attitude that converts **a** way of life into **the** way of life. He states: "Instead of the power of mono-vision, the power of double-vision may be what I should seek" (p. 334). As well, in order to focus on the issues of change and professional learning in this section of the literature review, I adopt Fullan's (1987) position, as he simply explains:

"In this paper, I use the terms 'in-service education', 'staff development', and 'professional development' interchangeably" (p. 221).

Dean (1991) states: "The speed of change and the explosion of knowledge are requiring people to learn afresh at intervals throughout their lives" (p. 1). This is true in the educational field and there is a need for educators to recognize the changing needs of children in today's ever changing technological world. "Restructuring" (Lieberman & Miller, 1990; Schlechty, 1990; Glickman, 1992; Tye, 1992; Maeroff, 1993; Newmann, 1993) and "Total Quality Management" (Bonsting, 1992; Glasser, 1992; Sztajn, 1992; Schmaoker & Wilson, 1993) are contemporary terms that support the need for educational change - each with a definite perspective toward professional learning as a way to promote necessary changes. As Holt (1993) discusses "Total Quality Management," he is "concerned with change, not as an end in itself - stable processes should be left alone - but as a way of facilitating necessary improvement" (p. 385). He continues with his view that professional learning needs to be the responsibility of all those involved in a systems approach to solving problems.

One such basic problem involves the transfer of knowledge and training from in-service activities to the classroom setting. The work of Joyce & Showers (1980, 1981) grew out of the results of a large scale study of staff development activities in the United States in 1978. From their research, they conclude that the following five components of in-service programs are essential for fundamental change to occur: 1) theory, 2) demonstration, 3) practice, 4) feedback, and 5) application with coaching. In continuing research projects they show why staff development is less effective if some of the components are missing. Fullan (1982) summarizes this position with an example indicating that theory by itself may stimulate interest or awareness, but contains no practical guidelines for use. Also, demonstrating or modeling a new teaching approach is proven to be ineffective because it shows concretely what the application would look like in practice but, in isolation, may lead to imitation, but not necessarily to serious or lasting use. Leaving out theory in order to stress practical application may lead to superficial change. Fullan states: "However, application in the regular classroom setting, combined with a system of coaching, feedback, and discussion of the underlying principles involving peers and consultants, is effective. While the work of Joyce and Showers leaves us with the powerful ideas that professional development programs designed to bring about fundamental change should incorporate all five components in some combination over time" (p. 270), these views cannot be translated into a checklist that will ensure success. These findings are simply another piece of research to assist in the planning process.

Fullan (1982) recognizes the importance of the work of Elliot and his colleagues in Great Britain. Their research studies particularly reinforce the importance of teacher-teacher interaction and use of a variety of methods to systematically collect classroom patterns and to facilitate teacher reflection on them. Elliot also uses his experience in leading in-service courses to find out how teachers learn; he then applies these principles in an analysis of practice. He suggests that the theoretical knowledge contributes to the learning of skills only after a certain level of practical knowledge has first been acquired. Fullan concurs and adopts this premise as a major focus in his work on planned change. He states: " The sequence is important - the movement from practice first to theory second, the enlargement of understanding which comes from movement back and forth between practice and theory as changes are attempted" (p. 270). Simply put, he believes that practices change before beliefs.

Such change theories brought a fresh look to staff development practices in the early 1980s. Researchers began to stress the importance of linking the research investigating the worth of in-service education with concepts in the change literature. Fullan (1982) says, "if we are interested in a theory of 'changing' - identifying those factors most possible to alter, and most instrumental in bringing about change at the level of practice - professional development would be at the top of the list" (p. 287). He suggests that changes in practices and beliefs, or in doing and thinking, are the essence of staff development, and then explores the "what" and "how" in these terms. He says the "what" of staff development is synonymous with "change," and believes that both terms simply mean learning something new, even though it is adult learning. In his view, "the logic is straightforward: 'staff development' = 'change'; 'change' = 'learning'; 'staff development' = 'learning" (p. 214).

We can examine Fullan's concept of "how" staff development should occur under ideal conditions, in order to better understand what makes in-service programs succeed. He says we must attend to four factors, the first of which is redefining staff development as a process of learning. He emphasizes that the role of leadership in the school is crucial, as is attention to the organizational school culture. Finally, Fullan believes we must consider the role of external change agents both at the local and regional levels.

Fullan (1991, p. 191) identifies the school superintendent as the most important person for establishing the expectations and setting the tone of the pattern of change within the local school system. Effective external consultants are also important in facilitating the development of meaning, both during the presentation of good information, and later in providing the follow up support for the use of that information. Consultants can effectively influence schools and provide opportunities for continuous improvement, especially as it is more commonly seen as a source of strength rather than a sign of weakness to seek assistance in dealing with complex problems and difficult issues in today's schools.

While acknowledging the evolutionary nature of teacher change, Fullan (1985) stresses that improvement occurs best through systematic and self-conscious reflection on experience and knowledge. He believes that failure to understand these concepts has resulted in ad hoc, short-term, limiting attempts at staff development. He postulates that staff development is one of the most important factors related to change in practice, but also reminds us that the amount of staff training is not necessarily related to the quality of implementation.

Guskey (1985, 1986) has contributed to the field his understanding of the importance of change process as orderly and achievable. He defines change as a developmental learning process for teachers, primarily based on experience and determined by teaching practices and classroom experiences. Guskey also believes that student learning outcomes are crucial in determining whether or not teachers accept new practices and innovations. He acknowledges the work of others in agreeing that effective staff development programs are changes in teacher beliefs and attitudes as well as their instructional practices. However, he adds a new dimension to the concept by emphasizing the importance of attending to the sequence of the change process. In addressing Guskey's position, Pajares (1992) says that "when teachers can be talked into using a procedure and find it successful in improving student achievement, tremendous attitudinal change is often reported" (p. 321).

Ruddick (1991) recognizes the dilemma between encouraging innovation to promote change in practice and respecting the existing beliefs of teachers, in what she refers to as a "paradoxical impression of stability and yet change, of diversity and yet sameness" (p. 27). She notes that in many efforts of planned change there appears to be little regard for what teachers have already accomplished as they are encouraged to adapt or abandon practices that are familiar and therefore comfortable. She believes that this denial of a person's professional past prevents the personal investment that is necessary if genuine change is to occur. Therefore, Ruddick recommends programs in which teachers feel a sense of control over what they want to change and how they want to go about it. Ruddick states: "The potential for professional development can be at its most powerful in a context of change, particularly when teachers understand and are committed to the values that give meaning to the change" (p. 91).

While Bradley's (1987) plan for change appears somewhat simplistic, it is important to consider the pragmatic factors he addresses when developing comprehensive programs to guide staff development efforts. He presents an analysis of what he believes is needed to bring about change in the schools. Stating the obvious, he says the awareness that a problem exists is the first step in the analysis of a particular situation, while a willingness to do something about it is just as important. The attitudes of senior staff members and the nature of other external pressures must also be considered. And, finally, Bradley believes we must look at the availability of support and services. If these basic factors are not considered, the staff may never debate the more philosophical issues.

Theoretical classification systems categorize those who initiate change and implement change. Hall & Hord (1987) identify these three change facilitator styles as Initiators, Managers, and Responders. Initiators have clear, decisive, long-range policies and goals that transcend but do not neglect implementation of the current innovation; Managers combine responsive behavior with initiating actions, while Responders focus on traditional administrative tasks, allowing teachers to take the lead in initiating change. Their research shows that the most successful school principals are those initiators who create a change-facilitating team, while the manager style was the next most effective and the responder types were least successful in implementing change. While there are many other factors to consider in examining the role of the principal, it appears that this approach, in which the leader strives to develop a rational plan while recognizing the pragmatic choices and considerations that are involved, results in a reasonable approach that "works."

Using a typology developed by Doyle & Ponder, Tumposky (1987) addresses the three positions most people adopt when they are introduced to change and feel "it is fruitful to look at how implementation models consider (or fail to consider) the teachers' role in the process" (p. 187). Rational Adopters favor one-shot workshops that explain and demonstrate innovations, while Stone-Age Obstructionists are most likely to accept teacher-proof curriculum or materials when presented in in-service programs. Pragmatic Skeptics, on the other hand, adopt only the ideas and practices that they view as being incorporated easily into their classroom on an everyday basis. Tumposky believes that, while most teachers are Pragmatic Skeptics of in-service programs, most organizers are Rational Adopters. She outlines three fundamental premises upon which this perspective of change is based. First, that change is accomplished by individuals, not institutions. Second, that change is a highly personal experience, as is teaching. Third, that change entails developmental growth in both feelings and skills. She points out similarities between her perspective and that of Fullan. His concept of implementation as resocialization is based on interaction, as is her theory. She concludes that sustained curriculum implementation is a form of staff development and must also be ongoing, interactive, and cumulative.

Morine-Dershimer (1992) offers another realistic, and rather humorous, interpretation of how teachers manage change, as she classifies teachers under five labels (p. 2-4). The Steadfast Saboteur circumvents all efforts to implement new materials or procedures, while the Fretful Follower feels compelled to follow guidelines for implementation in minute detail. Wiry Wrestlers cope productively because they manage to exert some control over the process, and Lively Litterbugs enthusiastically embrace new methods and techniques, but rarely engage in sustained use of any of them. The Subtle Sculptor approaches change with a strong sense of purpose, clear understanding of personal costs, and an apparent disinterest in public recognition. Morine-Dershimer concludes that "teachers experienced with change efforts assure us they have the power to resist the change, or to implement the change effort, or to reshape the planned change so it fits their specific situation more appropriately" (p. 4).

Guba & Lincoln (1989) state: "Change cannot be engineered: it is a nonlinear process that involves the introduction of new information, and increased sophistication in its use, into the constructions of the individuals involved" (p. 45). Adopting this view, many researchers emphasize the importance of the teacher as the primary change agent (Fullan, 1993). Lally, et al. (1992, p. 112) believe that if we are to achieve the sort of major educational changes that will meet identified economic, cultural and individual needs, then we must put more focus on classroom teachers. Parker (1990, p. 87) concurs and says that school improvement and teacher improvement are synonymous concepts. Boomer & Torr (1987) trust in the power to change residing in each individual teacher and state:

> Each individual action does change the balance of power. Here lies much hope. Here breathes the sustenance and inspiration of all powerful teachers, individually and collectively. So long as teachers think new thoughts, schools will continue to change. Thought is energy. Thought resists entropy. (p. 3)

Levine (1989) offers a developmental perspective on teacher change, beginning with the *self.* She believes this approach diverges from the traditional approach, which focuses on getting other people to change, by recognizing that all growth starts from within. Levine presents a comprehensive approach in which she applies ideas about adult growth to specific programs and practices for professional development. She discusses a developmental framework for her ideas and applies the phase theories of Erikson, Levinson, and Gould, the stage theories of Kohlberg, Loevinger, and Kegan, and research on male/female differences to understand changes that occur in the real-life experiences of educators.

In 1972, Katz examined the development of teachers by focusing primarily on teachers of young children and the stages through which they progress in their professional lives: Survival, Consolidation, Renewal, and Maturity. Black, Puckett, & Bell (1992) describe these stages as follows. In the first year of teaching, Survival, teachers focus on how to get through each day and week and thereby require on-site classroom assistance, comfort, guidance and instruction in specific skills. In moving on to the next stage, Consolidation, they begin to focus on the needs of individual children, but still require the help of experienced teachers or consultants to help strengthen their knowledge. Katz believes that when teachers become bored with the past routines of the classroom teachers, they enter the stage of Renewal and feel the need for new ideas; thus, they are often searching for different ways of teaching by attending workshops, reading journals, or visiting other classrooms. In the final stage, Maturity, behavior varies from teacher to teacher. Katz suggests some teachers reach this stage by their third year of teaching, while for others it may take five or more years. When teachers reach this stage they seek out more information about the nature of learning and about the profession in a variety of unique and individual ways.

Beginning from a similar developmental position, and asserting that no one phase of development is necessarily superior to another, researchers in the Report to the Ford Foundation (Academy for Educational Development, (1985) also identify four developmental phases, each defining the teacher's chief focus of attention at a particular time. In the first phase, career orientation and clinical training, the individual brings theory to practice through practical experiences in efforts to overcome problems of order and routine. Next, in the coping to understand phase, the teacher understands how to fit into the school culture and begins to feel "at home" in the school community. In the third phase, when the teacher is individualizing pedagogy, he or she determines the best instruction for the greatest number of students, and finds a personally satisfying curriculum. In the last phase, differentiating pedagogy, the teacher adapts instruction and curriculum to individual needs, interests and abilities, and determines what does not work.

Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren (1993) believe that professional growth is best understood by focusing on the nature of the change process. They discuss what change involves, how it happens, and under what conditions it prevails in the context of early childhood education. These authors use the sequence of change as proposed by Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin & Hall (1987) to explain and illustrate the predictable phases people go through as they attempt to make a new strategy their own - nonuse, orientation, preparation, mechanical use, routine use, refinement, integration, and renewal. These writers state: "When thinking about the change process, one might wonder whether people ever arrive at a final destination .... For those of us involved in early childhood education, change is a way of life" (p. 453).

As I attempt to find commonalities among these diverse perspectives, I also recognize the need to respect the pluralistic nature of the literature on educational change. In discussing the ideas of John Dewey, Greene (1993) says "he never thought in terms of homogeneities or the kind of sharing that overwhelms diversity. One of the ends in view where connectedness and cooperation were concerned was the release of individuality" (p. 2). She continues by stating that "we need to open spaces of possibilities" (p. 16). Considering the multiplicity of viewpoints on this topic does present the reader with many possibilities. Such possibilities are manifested in the many frameworks, approaches, perspectives, and models created to support the professional learning of teachers.

Professional Learning Potpourri:
Frameworks, Approaches, Perspectives and Models

Schutz (1962) presents a theoretical framework of rational, reasonable, and common sense action from which the different perspectives of those who develop professional learning programs can be explored. *Rational action* presupposes that professional development programs have clear and distinct insight into the ends, the means, and the secondary results of the programs they initiate. *Reasonable action* is based on the premise that the participants involved in professional development programs will make judicious choices among the different possible courses of action suggested. *Common sense action* recognizes the "taken-for-granted" nature of teachers as they tacitly make decisions about their own professional learning with little deliberation on abstract or complex theoretical concepts. Thus, professional development programs strive to promote "what works" in a practical way.

Schutz's framework can be used to classify a variety of professional learning alternatives. One such alternative is the "Project Approach" (Katz & Chard, 1989). The views of these authors are presented in a workshop format that represent a *rational* program to promote pedagogical change. This experiential approach emphasizes clear objectives, sequential methods, and specific strategies which support the learning theories upon which it is based . Cortazzi (1991) is most likely supporting the notion that teachers choose only the innovative changes that they believe to be *reasonable* in the context of their teaching, as she states that "despite recent changes in education, it seems teachers' culture has a strong element of stability and uniformity" (p. 3). Riley (1992) reflects the *common sense* view of many teachers as he cynically criticizes the empty rhetoric of today's idealistic visionary approaches to school improvement. He says "the time has come to toss out the nonsense, to focus on the real problems that teachers face in their classrooms - and to attempt solutions that are a little less glorious than revolutionary and a lot more practical" (p. 241). In a conclusion that tickles the funny bones of practitioners, he states: "if it looks like manure and smells like manure, we don't have to swallow it to be sure" (p. 241).

Lieberman (1982) puts the theory of Schutz into a problematic context, as she states:

> The major dilemma is trying to make an abstract idea work versus doing what one knows how to do and what one is used to. What dominates the inherent tension of trying out new ideas is the appearance that rationality, plans, expert advice, fidelity to the planner's view on any innovation, can somehow be translated into practice. In reality, what happens is that a variety of questions come to the fore and the tangled web of human relations, values, practicalities, and problems of the creation of a new setting are revealed. (p. 260)

Fullan (1987, pp. 217-219) provides an organizational framework which explains the goals and assumptions of different perspectives on professional learning. He identifies three main tendencies toward programming, and says "what is a primary focus for staff development in one program is a contextual condition in another" (p. 218). In the *knowledge utilization approach,* there is a rational belief that important research and innovations do exist, and that we should be maximizing and further developing knowledge, based on sound educational theories. In the *self* or *institutional utilization approach,* the goals are to empower teachers and schools to participate more fundamentally and critically in defining and sharing their own professional existence, thereby making professional choices which guide their pedagogical actions. In the *evolution approach,* the focus is on teacher experience, with the belief that professional development occurs continuously as teachers deal with experiences in a common sense, matter-of-fact way in the classroom. If planned at all, staff development must be planned so practice serves as vicarious experience for practitioners in such a way as to stimulate reflections, insights, natural application, and personal change.

When Fullan identifies the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, he points out that each focus ultimately has the same vision - increasing the professional skills and thinking of teachers. However, he also emphasizes the importance of diversity and states that "some cross-fertilization does seem desirable" (p. 219). Howey, Bents, & Corrigan (1980) claim that in-service education must be interrelated with forms of organizational development, but that it must also take into account how the teacher's personal and psychological development interacts with the professional role.

One such interrelated approach is provided by Diamond (1991) in a theoretical framework he presents to account for "different aspects of teacher development and to enable an overview of the complex processes and interactions that are involved in in-service education" (p. 46). This framework is based on his view that "perspective transformation" involves assisting teachers in better understanding how to interpret reality from many different meaning perspectives (p. 15). He uses a technique proposed by Kelly, *Fixed Role Therapy or Treatment (FRT)* to help change the constructs underlying classroom pedagogies of practising teachers. Beginning with an examination of existing construct systems, teachers are then invited to try out new teaching styles in the classroom through a process of "alternative role enactment" and finally revisit original and newly developed construct perspectives. Diamond says of this method: "FRT can have positive effects when teachers are encouraged to demonstrate their rationality not by commitment to fixed ideas, immutable concepts and stereotyped procedures, but by the way in which, and the occasion on which, they change those ideas, concepts and procedures" (p. 66).

Bell (1991a, pp. 1-22) outlines three broad approaches to the professional development of teachers. In the *individualistic approach* the teacher acts, more or less, in isolation, identifying, prioritizing, and finding ways of meeting his or her own needs. In the *group approach* teachers act as a group but respond as individuals in a school-based type of professional development. The *school development approach* is characterized by the extent to which teachers make choices about their own needs, priorities, and provision at the whole school level, as well as at group and individual levels.

In Letiche, van der Wolf, & Plooij (1991), Bell uses these approaches to outline the advantages, disadvantages, and assumptions of four professional learning models commonly used in England and Wales: 1) *The Apprenticeship Model,* 2) *The Course-Based Model,* 3) *The School-Based* or *School-Focused Model,* and 4) *The Professional Development Model.* The last model situates professional development in an overall policy framework and, although in its infancy, it is "based on the assumption that professional development is an integral part of the whole-school policy and can be effective both as part of the continuing process of managing the school and as a contributing factor in initiating and supporting necessary changes" (p. 101). However, Bell says the *Course-Based Model* is still the most common and widely accepted approach to the development of teachers in Great Britain.

Maeroff (1993) believes that the group or *team approach* has been tried far less often than other approaches as a method for instigating change. "This means creating a phalanx - including the principal - of true believers who assume ownership of new ideas and learn strategies for implementing them, and for winning adherents among their colleagues in the school community" (p. 513). The team consists of individual teachers who learn an approach that they can then teach other teachers in an attempt to orient a school toward the continuous intellectual renewal of those who work in it. McPherson & Shapiro (1993) provide an illustration of this team approach to professional learning as they describe a seminar experience for teachers in which the "emphasis is on dialogue, discourse, and debate rather than more passive forms of learning" (p. 7).

There are many approaches and models presented in recent literature which are based on a teacher-centered perspective. Lally, et al. (1992) suggest a *Collaborative Teacher-Centered Model of In-Service Education*. This model supposes that each individual changes in relation to his/her own existing practice and emphasizes active participation, shared reflection and discussion in which the centrality of teacher and pupil involvement is stressed. Parker (1990) proposes that the *Prototypic Human Resource Model* that has as its goal the development of cohesion as well as the professional growth of each individual will be the one that helps to promote change within the organization" (p. 87). Parker encourages staff development planners to remember that successful professional development activities are frequently initiated by the individual teacher, but may take place outside the local school district. Yonemura (1986) emphasizes practical knowledge and practical reasoning as guides for action in a professional development approach she uses with an early childhood education teacher. This approach to professional learning recognizes that the teacher's personal and professional knowledge is "underpinned by values and beliefs that, for better or for worse, influence children's lives" (p. 6) and that these perspectives can be better understood when the teacher becomes actively involved in thinking and talking about her own practice.

While Firestone (1993) recognizes that it is beneficial to make changes in the settings in which teachers work, to give teachers more influence over curriculum and budget, and to create opportunities for collaboration, he believes these are not sufficient to cause substantial changes in schools. Therefore, he promotes a professional development program which stresses improved pedagogy. He states: "If new approaches to teaching are to catch hold with more than a few teachers, large scale staff development that models active learning will be necessary" (p. 10). He argues that most teachers do not know how to teach in student-centered ways because they did not experience such teaching as students and were not exposed to it in their teacher training; therefore, he believes that comprehensive packages for school reform should include concentrated endeavors to help teachers understand new approaches to teaching through active participation in learning experiences that promote the practice of new pedagogical methods.

Jones (1993) outlines a professional growth model for Early Childhood Education which applies a "constructivist perspective" to staff development. She states:

> Just as young children learn about their world by playing its scripts, teachers learn about teaching and learning by playing the *teaching* script, observing what happens, and discussing all the possibilities with other teachers. They come to see themselves as *people who know* - and thereby people capable of making appropriate choices for themselves and for children. (p. xiii)

Jones believes staff development programs can provide optimum professional learning experiences by balancing a variety of related concerns.

In her view, it is important for those designing programs to make decisions determining when "power" should be used to require teachers to make necessary changes and when teachers should be given the freedom to use personal "initiative" in the change process. In a similar manner, she says staff development plans may emphasize training or facilitation, expert or collegial relationships, and personal or impersonal relationships, and may rely on internal or external personnel for its implementation, depending on the individuals involved in the change process. Jones further defines her model as open-ended and emergent, "focused on the quality of the learning process rather than on specified outcomes" (p. 146). Therefore, the overall purpose for "growing teaching partnerships" is to provide opportunities for teachers to "reflect on their own practice in dialogue with other teachers, identify changes they want to try, try them, and continue making changes" (p. 146) with no pressure to meet any completion deadlines.

Gordon (1992) discusses an approach that promotes the *interactive* nature of a curricular-instructional system in which staff development is just one component. This integrated system also includes leadership development, improvement of the school environment, curriculum development, and school-wide instructional improvement. He believes this approach empowers teachers and also changes, but does not diminish, the role of a teacher supervisor or evaluator. Gordon states: "The key to a proper tension between the needs for commonality and diversity is to define common goals but to allow teachers choice in how they attain these goals" (p. 70).

Levine (1992) and Glickman (1992) present models of unique schools in which professional learning plays a key role in an interactive approach. Levine explains the workings of *Professional Practice Schools,* identifying them as centers for reflection, experience and inquiry in which teachers themselves are constantly learning, thus increasing the possibility that they are likely to be "places where students would not only learn, but learn how to learn" (p. 8). Professional practice schools "value, promote, organize and practice teacher development by explicitly connecting it to student development" (p. 121). They become centers in which pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, outside collaborators and supervisors, and students all learn together as they handle everyday situations "that are uncertain, indeterminate, unique, and conflict ridden" (p. 16).

Glickman (1992) also proposes an integrated model in which direct assistance, staff development, curriculum development, and group development are connected within an action research format. He is instrumental in designing a Program for School Improvement (PSI) under which The League of Professional Schools (LPS) has been developed. Within schools that belong to LPS, there is a commitment to school-based changes in which the schools have control over their own staff development. "Staff development time and money should be used to plan and learn together those pedagogical methods, procedures, and skills needed to accomplish the school's goals" (p. 27). The "exemplar school" approach (Schlechty, personal communication, April, 1993) of both Levine and Glickman calls for staff developers and "supervisors to master a variety of interpersonal approaches, including directive, collaborative, and non-directive, and to match particular approaches to teacher's developmental levels, needs, interests and abilities" (Glickman, 1992, p. 69).

Teachers Developing

Many people believe that concomitantly supporting teachers as they interact with others, and as they reflect on both pedagogical and personal experience, will ultimately contribute to the success of students and to the overall improvement of schools through the ongoing development of teachers. In exploring these interactive concepts, I hope to discover common ground upon which the diverse professional development approaches, perspectives and models can converge. "Reflective inquiry" and "social interaction" are complementary concepts that appear to permeate the various perspectives, approaches, and models of professional learning found in the literature. When Levine (1992) states: "Reflective practice requires collegial interaction and a structure that supports inquiry" (p. 16), she is acknowledging the importance of both experience and a basic respect for the practitioner's knowledge.

Henderson (1992) cautions that, in the process of inquiry and reflection, the concept of professional knowledge should not be rejected. He states: "Reflective, inquiring teachers are knowledgeable, but their knowledge base is personalized, self-constructed and ever-expanding" (p. x). He presents the characteristics of reflective practice as: 1) an ethic of caring, 2) a constructivist approach to teaching, and 3) artistic problem solving (pp. 2-6). Along with Gilligan, (1982), Noddings (1984), and Beck (1992), he embraces a caring ethic as a central guide to all interpersonal interactions and feels teachers are ethically bound to understand their students. He believes reflective inquiry is based on a constructivist approach in which students are active participants during the learning process. To him, artistic problem solving involves judgment, imagination, and flexibility, and he encourages teachers to make learning meaningful by adapting the curriculum to the students' background, interests, and needs. Henderson says, "the essence of educational inquiry involves taking a questioning, pondering, democratic perspective on the personal and public virtues of teaching and learning" (p. 6).

Davis (1987) defines theorizing as *"thinking about practice,* rather than as an abstraction remote from practice;" therefore, she believes that all teachers are theorists, "as all teachers think about the whats, whys, and hows of their classroom practice" (p. 17). Schon (1987) describes the "reflective practitioner" as an individual who repeatedly adapts professional knowledge to context through "reflection in action," and thereby constructs a "new theory of the unique case" (p. 68). While each of these perspectives have merit, the individual views of Davis and Schon represent a difference between the process of reflecting "in," as opposed to "about" or "on," action.

Yonemura (1986) recognizes Schon's position as she believes that the way in which professionals think "in action" should be brought to a level of consciousness in order for the reflective process to be studied intellectually. She believes teachers become "comfortable with the deliberative, reflective mode" (p. 135) of collegial conversations in which they engage in this type of thoughtful self-examination to develop insights into their practice. Levine (1992) would support this approach, as she says we need to provide opportunities for teachers to develop the ability, the habits of mind, and the sensitivities necessary for reflective inquiry (p. 107). Rudduck (1991) agrees, as she suggests that "teachers, like artists, can learn from and through the reflective study of their everyday activity" (p. 104).

Speaking from a phenomenological perspective, van Manen defines "pedagogical reflection" as the endeavor to influence the good effect that teachers may have on children. He believes that, as we reflect, we "suspend our immediate involvements in favor of a more contemplative attitude" and "that some active or interactive reflection happens in the midst of life as we stop and think while we are doing something" (van Manen, 1991, p. 111). He classifies reflection into four types: 1) *anticipatory reflection,* which enables teachers to deliberate on a variety of possible courses of action; 2) *interactive reflection* (reflection-in-action), which allows us to come to terms with immediate concerns; 3) *mindfulness,* which is a special kind of pedagogical awareness that occurs within an interactive experience; and 4) *recollective reflection,* which helps us to make sense of past experiences, thereby gaining insight into the meaning of our experiences with children. From van Manen's perspective, theory and practice come together in an emotional and reflective act, which he calls "pedagogical thoughtfulness."

The reflexive nature of teacher thinking is often described in the literature. Grundy (1987) states: "The role of reflexivity in teaching is, I believe, central to the development of critical consciousness and the understanding of teaching experiences. Furthermore, it enhances the notion of the teacher as a learner through the active practice of moving from theory through practice to further theorizing" (p. 119). Olsen & Eaton (1987) believe the reflexive process should be more thorough and productive. "Teachers are not strong in self-criticism, or constructive and imaginative in their grasp of innovative ideas, and support may be needed to make the reflexive process of change create the impact that is needed for curriculum developments of the future" (Calderhead, 1987, p. 13). Diamond (1991) demonstrates an interesting reflexive perspective when he states: "Our growth as teachers may consist in turning around on our own sense of self and then remaking it" (p. 91).

Kagan (1992) presents an interesting construct from which to view the social interactions that support reflective inquiry. She sees *cooperation,* *coordination*, and *collaboration* as three distinct types of communication forms, and envisions them on a three-level pyramid. *Cooperation*, which forms the base, is the easiest and most widely achieved approach, as it typically involves informal relationships between people who do not have full knowledge of one another's goals. *Coordination*, the middle level, involves individuals coming together to meet a mutual goal, but each retaining their autonomy, even though they engage in sustained joint planning. *Collaboration*, at the apex of the pyramid, represents the most complex and difficult to achieve of these three relationships. It is characterized by joint goals, compatible strategies, shared resources and leadership, mutual respect, and durable, sustained interpersonal relationships. She concludes that durable collaboration "derives from the need to develop the effort in harmony with its surrounding context" (p. 17).

Lieberman & Miller (1992) believe genuine collaboration can only occur in an atmosphere of openness and trust; they stress colleagueship and experimentation which can provide opportunities for "increased support for self-examination, risk-taking, and collective reflection on practice" (p. 107). In supporting colleagueship and collaboration, they note that they are also providing the "necessary conditions for teachers to reconceptualize their work, to engage in active investigation about their practices, and to expect that professional learning and growth are part of the work life in schools" (p. 108). Davis (1987) addresses this same issue as she recognizes the importance of teachers sharing power during collaboration. She states: "Teachers who talk together about their practice find that the exchange of ideas and information can be mutually empowering when they share equal and important insights into student learning" (p. 14).

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberg & Tarule (1986) found that people who participated in effective collaboration referred to it as "real talk" and say this implies a mutually shared agreement that the collaborators are creating an atmosphere in which ideas can develop and grow. "Real talk reaches deep into the experiences of each participant. It draws on the analytic ability of each. Conversation, as constructivists describe it, includes discourse and exploration, talking and listening, questions, argument, speculation, and sharing" (p. 144).

Gersten, Woodward & Morvant (1992) view collaboration as an "intensive, long-term, and intimate process" (p. 34). They discuss a dynamic "mentoring" program in which the participants discovered that most teachers became more reflective during and after each teacher-mentor discussion. Henderson (1992) reports success through participation in "collegial professional development groups" (p. 108). Other researchers have found that "coaching" programs are beneficial when participants focus on a set of mutual goals (Tye, 1992). Fullan (1992) believes that coaching programs are typically more beneficial than mentoring programs, as they tend to be "more voluntary, and smaller in scale" (p. 102), although he also says both types of contrived collaboration can be ineffective if they are viewed by teachers as impositions. There have also been successful results reported from more informal interpersonal collaboration among teachers. Morine-Dershimer (1992) emphasizes the importance of developing supportive collegial relationships, especially when teachers are implementing innovation. She encourages teachers to share ideas with those who have similar attitudes and beliefs, and says "teachers can manage change more effectively if they have at least one colleague to talk with on a regular basis" (p. 5).

In supporting the reflective study of teachers through discussion, Rudduck (1991) also stresses the importance of talking to the students about changes occurring in the classroom. She looks to Aoki to provide an alternate approach to the imposition of an innovation on students; this approach focuses on student-teacher interaction. She quotes Aoki, who states: "Though the authority of the teacher is to explore the character of the innovation with pupils, the teacher may invite pupils to enter his or her interpretive framework and sort out the meaning of the innovation in dialogue" (p. 65).

Fullan (1993) identifies both "inquiry" and "collaboration" as components of an interrelated and mutually reinforcing approach to building greater change capacity in individual teachers. He says "inquiry is necessary for forming and reforming personal purpose" which is realized through personal vision building. While he believes inquiry "comes from within, it must be fueled by information and ideas from the environment" (p. 13). However, he also says people behave their way into new visions and ideas, not just think their way into them; thus, learning mastery, in which teachers know where new ideas fit and become skilled in using them, is also an important goal. In emphasizing the importance of collaboration, Fullan states: "The ability to collaborate on both a small and a large scale is becoming one of the core requisites of postmodern society" (p. 14). Fullan (1991) believes the notion of the isolated, autonomous professional is no longer appropriate and sees the teaching in the future as *interactive professionalism.* He states: "I see teachers and others working in small groups interacting frequently in the course of planning, testing new ideas, attempting to solve different problems, assessing effectiveness, and so on" (p. 120).

"Reflective inquiry" and "collaboration" may be relatively new terms in the literature, but the concepts are not. Westbrook (1992) returns to John Dewey and the progressive movement in the early part of this century and states: "The process of mental development," Dewey contended, "is essentially a social process, a process of participation" (p. 512). Greene (1993) also quotes Dewey: "The mindful individual is engaged in participant thinking in the midst of life," and "The thoughtful person is not only grounded, she or he is given to rational thinking, contextualized thinking" (p. 5). Greene expresses: "There are persons in education choosing themselves again, collaborating voluntarily in regard for the experiential, for the kinds of questioning that arise out of lived activities in all their ambiguity and complexity" (p. 10). From this perspective she describes an increasing interest in "conversation," and refers to Bakhtin who is studying this phenomena by exploring "the dialogical and the multiple voices engaging in sense making" (p. 9).

Perhaps Burke (1990) best identifies common ground in the process of teachers developing through involvement in professional learning experiences, as he succinctly states: "Thoughtful education is reflection. It is time for those of us who create the models, programs, and strategies to work together. Collaboration is crucial to successful reflection" (p. 211).

Arriving at a Personal Framework

I have synthesized the literature review to arrive at a personal perspective to guide my research study. I suggest that a many-layered and multi-faceted approach to effective professional learning is carried out within a philosophical framework of change.

- **Change is dynamic.**

Professional learning is dynamic, not static. It can have a powerful influence on education by remaining responsive to the changing needs of children in contemporary society. Yesterday's educational solutions are inadequate for meeting the needs of today's children and for solving current educational problems. As teachers grapple with educational strategies which are no longer effective in today's society, professional learning can become a visionary means to allow educators to adapt and modify existing pedagogy in accordance with new beliefs and practices and with the anticipated needs of tomorrow's world. *Teachers can develop vision through professional learning.*

- **Change is a process.**

Professional learning is a process, not an event. Teachers must remain open to new learning throughout their educational careers. This learning takes many forms over time, and changes in response to the teacher's development and to the existing school environment. This process is not linear, but cyclical. Each pedagogical change invites personal assessment and opens the way for new possibilities. *Teachers can develop perspective through the process of professional learning.*

- **Change focuses on the individual.**

Professional learning focuses on the individual, not on the educational system. Pedagogical change occurs as teachers change and the system changes as a result of these individual accomplishments. Thus, opportunities must be provided for empowering teachers to participate in their own change process. Effective professional learning does not rest solely on changing pedagogical strategies nor on changing teacher beliefs; instead, teacher growth lies within the dynamic interaction between the two. When teachers experiment with new ideas and then think and talk about the meaning of their actions, there is opportunity for personal and professional discovery. *Teachers can develop self-efficacy through professional learning.*

* **Change is created through social interaction.**

Professional learning occurs in a social context, not in isolation. Teachers live and work within a social and cultural milieu in which they continually interact with children and colleagues. While reflective inquiry may result in collegial personal relationships or in expert-teacher impersonal relationships, collaboration is an important component of personal and professional reflection and learning. As teachers enter into dialogue with others, they create personal meaning. *Teachers can develop shared meanings through professional learning.*

* **Change is a personal experience.**

I began the first chapter by talking about personal changes that were imposed, inspired, or non-directed and inevitable. I have come to a place where I believe that enduring change occurs when one's pedagogy becomes part of who one is; thus, the teacher changes as a person through a process of "coming to know." When Diamond (1991) states: "People change through changing themselves first and they accomplish their concerns, if at all, only by paying the price of altering themselves," I think he is referring to the type of genuine change that I believe is the result of successful professional learning experiences. *Teachers develop "self" through professional learning.*

Therefore, vigorous and effective professional learning programs are not only sensitive to the needs of individual teachers, but also promote educational goals aimed at improving educational learning opportunities for children. Through an interactive social process, the beliefs of teachers are enhanced and they develop and grow as professionals and as human beings. *"Teachers developing" is the ongoing goal of professional learning and educational change.*

CHAPTER III

CONSTRUCTING THE RESEARCH MODEL

> What we know as teachers is grounded both in our personal assumptions and in those that are socially shared. As a result, the classroom world of teaching and learning that we seek to understand always remains just on the horizon of our thoughts.
>
> Patrick Diamond, 1991, p. xiii

Introduction

As an early childhood practitioner, I constructed a pedagogical view based on the theories of Piaget (Wadsworth, 1984) and their practical application in the early childhood field by such educators as Kamii (1976, 1985) and de Vries (1987). I developed a "constructivist" perspective - an orientation that is supported by many early childhood development specialists. In more recent studies, I was pleased to learn that Guba & Lincoln (1989) also promoted a constructivist approach for research. "Eureka!" I naively thought, "It's a match. I've found **the** perfect fit for my research plans." Now after much more investigation, I realize that, while Piaget's theories are an important component in my view of "constructivism," they represent only **a** part of the picture. While it is difficult to trace one's steps in the process of coming to a deeper understanding of a particular world view, it is impossible to say, "I've got it now. I have all the answers!" As Schutz (1962) says, "Any individual's stock of knowledge at hand is at any moment of his life structured as having zones of various degrees of clarity, distinctness, and precision" (p. 14).

Therefore, in this chapter I will discuss my present interpretation which serves as the foundation of my research design. My point of view grows out of my study of constructivist scholars, but is also situated within the context of my early childhood education experiences as they relate to this research study. I will begin the chapter with a discussion on the constructivist stance, continue by applying this approach to research, and conclude with the methodological approach and research model for my study.

Constructing a Constructivist Perspective

Knowledge and Reality : A Construction

People understand reality from many different world views; two dominant perspectives are commonly labelled "constructivist" and "positivist." One way to better understand a particular concept is by identifying what it is not; therefore, in the tradition of "conceptual analysis" (Bas Levering, Personal Communication, May, 1991) I will explore the meaning of "constructivism" by contrasting it with a view of "positivism."

As it is typically understood, the positivist view represents reality as absolute truth, believing that knowledge is "out there" waiting to be discovered. This philosophy assumes that there are social *facts* with an objective reality apart from the beliefs of individuals; thus, positivists search for social facts separate from the subjective perceptions of individuals and endeavor to explain the *causes* of change in these facts. (Firestone, 1987, p. 16). The typical mode of positivist or logico-scientific (paradigmatic) thought within this paradigm "deals in general causes, and in their establishment, and makes use of procedures to assure verifiable reference to test for empirical truth" (Bruner, 1986, p. 13). This mode of thought has dominated societal thinking during much of this century and is still the prevalent way through which many people make sense of their world.

Other people view their world from a constructivist stance, suggesting that "what exists is a product of thought" (Bruner, 1986, p. 96). From this perspective, the process of coming to know involves the mind's ability to construct meaning through symbols, thereby creating reality. Bruner's constructivist perspective is "that we cannot know an aboriginal reality; that there is none; that any reality we create is based on a transmutation of some prior 'reality' that we have taken as a given. We construct many realities, and do so from differing intentions" (p. 158). These multiple realities lead to "multiple perspectives" and, when conflict arises between diverse perspectives, meaning is constructed through a process of "interpersonal negotiation." Bruner says: "Meaning is what we can agree upon or at least accept as a working basis for seeking agreement about the concept at hand" (p. 122). In the meaning making process he recognizes the importance of "emotion," and says emotion, thought, and action are part of a "unified whole." Bruner states: "Emotion is not usefully isolated from the knowledge of the situation that arouses it. Cognition is not a form of pure knowing to which emotion is added (whether to perturb or not). And action is a final common path based on what one knows and feels" (p. 118).

Bruner says that "part of our reality is the stance that the language implies toward knowledge and reflection and the generalized set of stances one negotiates creates in time a sense of one's self" (p. 132). Therefore, Bruner believes that as we construct the world, we also create Self. He states: "Self is a construction, a result of action and symbolization ... I think of Self as a text about how one is situated with respect to others and toward the world - a canonical text about powers and skills and dispositions that change as one's situation changes from young to old, from one kind of setting to another" (p. 130). In contrast to thinking in the positivist mode that calls for higher and higher levels of abstraction, the constructive perspective employs an imaginative application of the mode of narrative thinking which leads to "good stories, gripping drama, believable (though not necessarily 'true')" accounts of life. Bruner continues: "It deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course" (p. 13). Therefore, he suggests we construct realities or meaning of life from the "deeply encoded symbolic experiences we gain through interacting with our social world, or the vicarious experience we achieve in the act of reading" (p. 158).

Nelson Goodman sees this creative process as "world making" and says "that what we call the world is a product of some mind whose symbolic procedures construct the world" (Bruner, 1986, p. 95). Contrary to common sense, "no one 'world' is more 'real' than all others, none is ontologically privileged as the unique real world" (p. 96). Bruner defends Goodman's constructivist perspective, and says Goodman ends up calling his stance "a philosophy of understanding," believing it integrates the philosophies of science, art, and cognition. Therefore, the constructivist perspective "is inclusive, rather than exclusive, looks at the particular, rather that the general, sees realities as social constructions of the mind and facts as having no meaning except within some value framework" (Guba & Lincoln, 1986, p. 44).

In an interpretive critique of Bruner's constructivist perspective, Olson (1992) also compares and contrasts the constructivist stance (science of meanings and intention) with the positivist stance (science of responses or behavior) by saying that the former:

> would be concerned with the structure and growth of knowledge, not the processing of information; it would be concerned with the mind in its interpersonal, social, and cultural context, not as the internal mental processes of the individual; and it would be concerned with consciousness and subjectivity - not what a person said or did but with what the persona *thought* he or she said or did. It would treat all knowledge of the self, as "constructed", and its methods would be those of the interpretive social sciences rather than those of the empirical sciences. (p. 29)

By looking at these terms from the dichotomies provided by Bruner, Guba & Lincoln, and Olson, it becomes easier to see the meaning of the concepts and to better understand the rationale upon which the constructivist perspective is based.

In calling for a re-examination of the importance of constructivist thinking, Bruner is also drawing attention to the importance of the *process of inquiry* over an exclusive focus on *end products*; however, in so doing he does not discount the "paradigmatic" mode of thought. He says "the scientific stance is oriented outward to an external world; the other, inward toward a perspective and a point of view toward the world" (p. 52) This outward stance supports the proving of hypotheses, while the inward stance focuses on generating hypotheses through which one "cultivates multiple perspectives and possible worlds to match the requirements of those perspectives" (p. 53). While Bruner acknowledges that positivists do also create possible worlds, he believes that they often leave no space for possible alternate personal perspectives on the world. He postulates a position in which "the narrative and the paradigmatic come to live side by side" (p. 43).

Constructivist Theory of Piaget

Although Jean Piaget is primarily thought of as a child psychologist and educator, he first worked in the field of biology and preferred to to be classified as a genetic epistemologist (Wadsworth, 1984). "Piagetian constructivism," as defined by Kamii, is a "complex model in which each human actor, in interaction with others, constructs his or her own continually shifting knowledge" (Jones, 1993, p. xiii). While Piagetian theory has been advanced as a way of understanding children's development, his overall constructivist perspective toward learning can also contribute to a deeper understanding of knowledge and reality.

Piaget developed a theory of mental development based on his belief that "the developing child's knowledge of the world (and reality) is not a copy of the 'objective' world. Each individual, over the course of his or her development, constructs knowledge, and reality (through assimilation and accommodation)" (Wadsworth, 1984, p. 180). Piaget identified three distinct kinds of knowledge - physical, logical-mathematical, and social arbitrary - and believes this knowledge is not "acquired directly," but is "constructed by individuals." As a person constructs personal knowledge, Piaget believed he or she passes through predictable stages of cognitive development in the same order, but not necessarily at the same rate.

Piaget suggests that cognitive development is affected by four broad factors. (Wadsworth, 1984, pp. 29-33) He believes the development of each kind of knowledge depends on actions - either physical or mental - and that the types of actions that result in new knowledge are those that generate disequilibrium, thus leading to efforts to re-establish equilibrium, or what he calls *equilibration*. Piaget recognizes that *heredity* has an influence on maturational rates, and also that *active experience* contributes to cognitive growth. In addition, Piaget stresses the importance of *social interaction,* by which he means any social interchange between two or more people. Thus, "when language becomes functionally communicative, it is seen as a form of social interaction" (Wadsworth, 1984, p. 133).

In supporting the contributions of Piaget, Bruner (1986) says: " In the end, thanks to Piaget, we shall have a better sense of what self, what individuality, what local knowledge mean" (p. 148). He says, "Piaget's theory advocates the self-sufficiency of the present as an explanation of itself" (p. 140). Piaget believes that explanations for how individuals think are found in focusing on their reasoning at their present stage of development, and not in examining their past history; thus his position is that "growth is in the nurturing of intrinsic logic"(p. 145). Because research shows that adults do not all inevitably reach the *Stage of Formal Operations* (Beard, 1969), focusing on the type of reasoning exhibited by any individual at any particular point in time may have merit in interacting with people of any age.

Constructivist Theory of Berger and Luckmann

The constructivist perspective of Berger & Luckman is succinctly stated by Goodson & Mangan (1991): "Reality is socially constructed. All aspects of both the physical and social world known to us are apprehended through human sensibility, and are given shape and meaning through the social process of language and thought" (p. 9). In their book, The Social Construction of Reality, these scholars build on the ideas of philosopher and sociologist, Alfred Schutz (1962). They use Schutz's ideas on the "structure of the commonsense world of everyday life" to develop a theory of the sociology of knowledge based on the concept of "multiple realities", also previously discussed by Schutz.

Berger & Luckmann (1966) say commonsense knowledge "constitutes the fabric of meanings without which no society could exist" (p. 15). Reality also presents itself as an intersubjective world, a world shared, in which one cannot exist without continually interacting and communicating with others. In discussing interpersonal communication, they state: "I know that there is an ongoing correspondence between *my* meanings and *their* meanings in this world, that we share a common sense consciousness precisely because it refers to a world that is common to many men" (p. 23). These sociologists recognize the importance of face-to-face experiences, and believe that in face-to-face verbal interactions language "makes 'more real' my subjectivity not only to my conversation partner but also to myself" (p. 38). However, they also believe that knowledge in everyday life is "socially distributed;" we do not share knowledge equally with others and there is some knowledge that we share with no one.

In a subsequent book, published in 1967, Berger further elaborates his view of social constructivism by stating: "Society is a dialectic phenomenon." He continues: "There can be no social reality apart from man ..... Man cannot exist apart from society. The two statements, that society is a product of man and that man is the product of society are not contradictory. They rather reflect the inherently dialectic character of the societal phenomenon" (p. 3). Berger believes this dialectic process consists of three moments referred to as externalization, objectivication, and internalization, and explains:

> **Externalization** is the ongoing outpouring of human being into the world, both in the physical and mental activity of men. **Objectivity** is the attainment by the products of this activity (again both physical and

> mental) of a reality that confronts its original producers as a facticity external to and other than themselves. **Internalization** is the reappropriation by men of this same reality, transforming it once again from structures of the objective world into the subjective consciousness. (p. 4)

In the above passage, Berger explains the interconnectedness of self and world, thereby constructing a personal academic language to express his views. Employing a constructivist stance, I can use "my words" to reconstruct his views and thereby construct my own reality. Thus, I believe Berger & Luckmann are saying that we both develop a sense of self and make sense of the world as we experience it through interactions with society and culture. Because our words and actions have a profound impact on other people, on the ways in which they view their worlds, and on the physical world itself, we must be ever sensitive to the impact of our behavior on the physical world and on the people in it. The world also contains a material existence and social realities over which we have little control and cannot change; thus we are also deeply affected by the "givens" of a physical world, as well as the thoughts, actions, and feelings of others. While individuals do have common experiences in this material world, these too are individually mediated through the mind and thus can be interpreted in unique and different ways. Through the interactive process of shaping the world and being shaped by the world, we construct self; we develop a personal reality through which we make sense of these social interactions and thus make meaning of the constantly changing, interdependent cultural world in which we live.

Comparing Constructivist Perspectives

Bruner, Goodman, Berger & Luckmann, and Piaget have similar epistomological world views. They believe that the construction of reality is an organic and socially constructed process; as well, they all stress the important role that language plays within the context of real life experience. However, Piaget's theories are being re-examined by early childhood specialists in light of current research in the field. Silin (1987) quotes research findings supporting his view that Piaget's positivist research methodology is inappropriate, and also criticizes the procedures that produce such "decontextualized knowledge." Recently, Silin reiterates his caution against using Piaget's developmental metaphor as an exclusive model for early childhood education, as he believes it is based on "the exclusive use of psychological theory [that] devalues alternative ways of knowing children - aesthetic, symbolic, imaginative" (1993, p. 226). In a recent book on early childhood development by Black, Puckett & Bell (1992), these authors use Piaget's theories extensively as a primary source for interpreting each area of development; however, they also include a reflective analysis for each section stated "Beyond Piaget's Theory," thereby recognizing recent research in the field which suggests imperfections in the ways in which researchers have originally interpreted his theories.

McKay (1990) provides an insightful analysis of constructivist thought through the exploration of the perspectives of numerous theorists. In comparing the constructivist views of Bruner and Goodman with those of Kelly and Piaget, she states:

> I have come to understand that this [Bruner's view] is a different ontological stance from that of Kelly and Piaget, both of whom took the view that while individuals create meaning, this is a representation of a "real" or aboriginal world.....The difference between "construction" and "representation" becomes important if representation implies correspondence to an ultimate "reality" and "construction" implies the creation of "reality". The nature of multiple realities takes on a different significance when the idea of an ultimate reality is abandoned. Individual realities become possibilities rather than approximations or representations that imply a single, ultimate reality. (p. 35)

Bruner also recognizes this important difference between his view of constructivism and the view of Piaget as he says, "For Piaget, language *reflects* thought and does not determine it in any sense" (p. 144).

It is important for us to unpack the unique differences between constructivist perspectives in order to better understand them in the context of our world; however, it is also interesting to note how early childhood practitioners deal with the ontological inconsistency, as expressed by McKay. Kostelnik, Soderman & Whiren (1993) continue to value developmental psychology in their constructivist orientation, but also promote an increased emphasis on the environmental context in which the child functions; therefore they include a detailed explanation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model in their latest book. In so doing, they promote an "interactionist" philosophy that amalgamates both positions, emphasizing the interaction between biological and environmental influences. Constructivists who support this approach see human beings as "active in determining their own course of development" and believe "development occurs as a result of interactions between the individual (inherent) human characteristics and the environment (experience)" (p. 16).

I pause to reflect on my meaning making, as related to the research study. How does the difference in the view of these constructivists affect my work - or does it even matter? In struggling with this question, I now believe that I have a preliminary answer. When considering my research topic of "professional learning" from a representational (Piagetian, in this case) point of view, I survey the literature and focus on the topic from an objective stance, reflecting on those general findings that researchers deem to be reliable, valid, and generalizable - theoretical information I also value. Therefore, I look at the concept of " teacher develop**ment**." However, as I participate in my research and as I consider my subjective stance, as well as the individual views of the research participants, I am actively constructing my own individual professional learning theories, even as I collect and interpret the research data, ever sensitive to the possibilities found in the complexities of everyday life. So too are the participating teachers. This is "teachers develop**ing**." As we talk and think, alone and together, we are all struggling to make personal meaning and thus creating individual realities as we make meaning of our own unique experiences within this research study.

In Berger & Luckmann's terms, perhaps this constructive research process could be described as the interplay among "externalization," "objectivication," and "internalization." Perhaps there is always a degree to which we objectify "things," even as we talk about them and internalize the meanings. In the terms of the American philosopher, Needleman (1986), this point is illustrated by his idea of the difference between "studying philosophy" and "doing philosophy." He sees the former as an uncritical acceptance of disconnected ideas, while he views the latter as a process through which individuals throw familiar and comfortable ideas into question in the pursuit of personal meaning. Ultimately, perhaps learning is always an interfusion of different perspectives. Some may see the recognition of another mode of thought as shifting to a new paradigm. I would agree if one shifts to the "either/or" perspective, allowing only room for positivist thinking. I would disagree if one sees the constructivist stance as I do - one in which there is room for multiple ways of thinking. By its very nature the constructivist position is inclusive and allows such diversity.

As I compare the perspectives of these constructivist theorists, the views of Bruner seem to represent prevailing postmodern thinking, consistent with Lyotard (1984) when he states: "Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it defines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy" (p. xxi). Thus, Bruner reveals some of the thinking that has influenced his unique view of constructivism as he comments on "Nelson Goodman's Worlds" (pp. 93-105). In addition, Bruner explores "how the three modern titans of developmental theory - Freud, Piaget, and Vygotsky - may be constituting realities of growth in our culture rather than merely describing them" (p. 136). Through this interpretation, Bruner is demonstrating a constructivist attitude toward the dialectic world view, formally presented by Berger & Luckmann. In turn, these sociological theorists recognize the philosophical contributions of Schutz in the personal construction of their knowledge and reality. And so it continues - philosophers and theorists defining and redefining reality, each adapting former ideas to fit with new and different worlds, and each also both reflecting and creating the cultural context through this constructive process.

A Constructivist Perspective toward Research

Firestone (1987) acknowledges that there may be many reasons why an individual selects a particular methodological approach; however, he says "one's decision often expresses values about what the world is like, how one ought to understand it, and what the most important threats to that understanding are" (p. 20). I believe that the constructivist perspective provides the philosophical underpinnings that best support my research. Therefore, the words of Hodgkins (1985) are most appropriate, when he states:

> Believing is where learning starts. We know first, act on such knowledge and then get to know more. We may acquire sharp knowledge, built around reasons, causes and calculations, or vaguer knowledge, in which hopes, enigmas and alluring problems form the thread. The two ways often go together, for the activity of getting to know is compounded of feelings as well as of intellectual curiosity, of hunches as well as of facts. (p. 1)

Constructivist research falls within the qualitative paradigm and can be classified as "naturalistic research" or "human science research." As such, it "is characterized as emphasizing the importance of conducting research in a natural setting, as assuming the importance of understanding the participants' perspectives, and as assuming that it is important for researchers subjectively and empathetically to know the perspectives of their participants" (Jacob, 1988, p. 16). Yvonna Lincoln describes research from the naturalistic paradigm as circular, interactive, hermeneutic, and intuitive. She says constructivist research is based on the root assumption that reality is a social construction that can only be studied holistically and that causes cannot be separated from their effects in any meaningful sense (Personal Communication, 1991).

Constructivist research describes real people acting in real events and persuades its audience through rich depiction of details from the actual experiences of the participants. Firestone (1987) says these details are convincing because "they create a gestalt that makes sense to the reader" ..... [This process] depends on the active effort of the reader and the reader's willingness to check these details against personal experience" (p. 19). Firestone also believes it "presents a more complex view of the world in which there are limits and opportunities that individuals must take into account and use" (p. 19). These constraints and opportunities are real, but ambiguous; thus many choices are available to both researchers and participants as the study progresses. The constructivist researcher chooses relevant data from the descriptions to interpret what is happening in the natural setting and to understand the participants' meanings.

In advocating constructivist research, Guba & Lincoln (1989) say it involves "an interaction between observer and observed that literally creates what emerges from that inquiry" and thus is a "dialectic process that takes free advantage, and account, of the observer/observed interaction to create a constructed reality that is as informed and sophisticated as it can be made at a particular time" (p. 44). Howe (1992) says this methodology is "interpretivist" and "facilitative" and "makes it possible for individuals to better understand themselves and one another, which in turn makes more meaningful and effective participation in deliberation possible" (p. 247). In support of this position, he cites the work of Lincoln & Guba (1985, p. 41), as they discuss "negotiated outcomes:"

> [The preferred method is] to negotiate meaning and interpretations with the human sources from which the data have chiefly been drawn because it is their constructions of reality that the inquirer seeks to reconstruct; because inquiry outcomes depend upon the nature and quality of the interaction between the knower and the known, epitomized in negotiations about the meaning of data; because the specific working hypotheses that might apply in a given context are best verified and confirmed by the people who inhabit that context; because respondents are in a better position to interpret the complex mutual interactions - shapings - that enter into what is observed; and because respondents can best understand and interpret the influence of local value patterns. (p. 248)

Goodson & Mangan (1991) promote the "social constructivist perspective" as a research methodology and say it focuses "on the symbolic processes by which human beings create, sustain, and reproduce their life worlds" (p. 9). These researchers consider this perspective to have two fundamental sets of methodological implications. First, the meanings that the participants make of their actions must be comprehensively taken into account and, second, these meanings must be given high priority as they are developed and shared. The general aim of this research is to "launch a dialogue informed by new insights and new perspectives," which makes the experience as valuable to the participants as it is to the researcher. Thus, social constructivist research stresses that ethical procedures must be followed because "the human subjects of research [should] be recognized as fully-engaged participants in the process, with respect for their dignity and autonomy as individuals" (p. 13).

A Constructivist Method: The Narrative Approach

Noddings says: "Stories have the power to direct and change our lives" (cited in Carter, 1993, p. 5); thus, the narrative approach is consistent with constructivist research orientation. The underlying premise supporting the narrative method is that individuals derive meaning from their life experiences through stories and storytelling. Greene (1993) says there is attention being paid in many disciplines to "narrative and storytelling as ways of knowing, ways of learning and sense making" (p. 12). Lyotard (1984, pp. 18-37) discusses the importance of legitimizing the narrative in the traditional scientific world; Bruner (1986, pp. 11-43) presents his interest in storytelling as a mode of constructivist thinking; Yonemura (1986) tells the story of an early childhood teacher at work; Paley (1986) tells colorful stories demonstrating how young children learn; Belenky, et al. (1986) listen to the stories of hundreds of women and then develop a theory of how women come to know; and van Manen (1986; 1990; 1991) uses many "anecdotes" and stories to illustrate the "lifeworld" and "lived meanings" in his writing. Gergen (1988) summarizes the importance of narrative by stating that people's self-narratives are social products. "They are temporary constructions that are shaped by such important factors as literary conventions, social norms, the context of the narration and self-determined social goals" (p. 3).

Connelly & Clandinin (1990) state: "Humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative is the study of the ways in which humans experience the world" (p. 2). They continue by explaining that narrative is both phenomenon and method. Narrative is the term used to describe the structured quality of the experiences to be studied and thereby names the patterns of inquiry or method for study. Connelly & Clandinin refer to the phenomenon as "story" and to the inquiry method as "narrative." In discussing the relationship between narrative and story in teacher education, they say:

> Narrative, for us, is the study of how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves

> that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future. Deliberately storying and restorying one's life or a group or cultural story is, therefore, a fundamental method of personal and social growth. It is a fundamental quality of education. (p. 3)

Polkinghorne (1988) discusses narrative from a psychological perspective, and believes that narrative is the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful. It provides a structure that holistically organizes events and human actions, thereby giving significance to individual actions and events based on their effect on the whole. In explaining his perspective, Polkinghorne says language has a fundamentally crucial function in knowledge creation, as "its grammatical, rhetorical and narrative structures constitute the subjects and objects that appear in the order of meaning." These linguistic forms are paramount for they "filter and organize information from the physical and cultural realms and transform it into the meanings that make up human knowledge and experience. On the basis of this constructed experience, we understand ourselves and the world, and we make decisions and plans regarding how we will act" (p. 158).

Rosen (1986, p. 230) also suggests that the narrative has an importance much deeper and broader than a purely literary value. He believes story has "pre-eminence among the discourse options open to us," because it is 1) a mode of knowledge emerging from action; 2) the imposition of formal coherence among chaotic human events; 3) a primary and irreducible form of human comprehension, and 4) the central function of the human mind. Given its importance, he laments the fact that researchers do not sufficiently stress the communicative aspect of the narrative and the "process of the making of the narrative." Rosen cautions researchers to be aware of four "basics" of narrative analysis (p. 229). First, it matters *which* stories we select because the story must be able to engage with the world of feeling and thought in the listener or reader. Second, listening or reading a story is an exploration by the receiver, not a set of responses to someone else's questions in a right or wrong format. Third, researchers need to ask *why* we should remember a story and not simply *what* we remember. Finally, the most constructive way of examining the hold a story has is for it to be presented in a favorable context and to be retold in an equally favorable one.

Van Manen (1990, pp. 115-121) focuses on the "anecdote" as a special kind of short story, a specific story or narrative form. He presents examples of anecdotes and concludes they "are not to be understood as *mere* illustrations to "butter up" or "make more easily digestible" a difficult or boring text. Anecdote can be understood as a methodological device in human science to make comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us" (p. 116). Van Manen further states: "Anecdotal narratives (stories) are important for pedagogy in that they function as experiential case material on which pedagogical reflection is possible" (p. 121). He sees the anecdotal narrative as important in research writing because of its power to compel, to lead us to reflect, to involve us personally, to transform, and to measure one's interpretive sense.

Carter (1993) answers the question, "What is story?" by stating it is "a text that elicits, guides, and rewards ... the active constructions of a story from the information provided ... Stories consist, then, of events, characters, and settings arranged in a temporal sequence implying both causality and significance" (p. 6). She believes that, through the creation of stories, we impose order and coherence on our experience and are able to better understand the meaning of incidents and events in our everyday lives. Thus, she argues for the centrality of story in our thinking and quotes Elbaz who states:

> Story is the very stuff of teaching, the landscape within which we live as teachers and researchers, and within which the work of teachers can be seen as making sense. This is not merely a claim about the aesthetic or emotional sense of fit of the notion of story with our intuitive understanding of teaching, but an epistemological claim that teachers' knowledge in its own terms is ordered by story and can best be understood this way. (p. 7)

Diamond (1991) refers to narrative as the "giving and taking of stories" and says it is crucial for educational research. He states: "If our behavior is largely controlled by our interpretation of events and if reality is constituted by our internal fictions, language and its productions can give us the most immediate access to them" (p. 90). Thus the "narrative mode of making sense" provides a natural way for teachers to understand classroom experiences, and also for researchers to assist them as they reflect on the complexities involved in their teaching stories. However, Diamond suggests story telling is more than classroom problem solving; teachers construct a "teacher self" through telling these stories. He says: "To change our stories is to change our lives" (p. 91).

A Constructivist Model: Teacher Research

Constructivist research that employs a narrative approach can exist within the framework of a variety of models or traditions, many of which may have been relevant frameworks for my study. Through an exploration of these "naturalistic" models, I gained important understandings about their basic congruencies; however, each one contained specific procedural components that seemed too restrictive for the direction I wanted my research to take. Thus, I created a model which incorporates aspects from a variety of these traditions. This approach is used by other researchers and is simply referred to as *Teacher Research* (Goswami & Stillman, 1987; Hopkins, 1987; Nias, 1991; Fessler, 1990).

My approach focuses on teachers. It is based on inquiry and dialogue, recognizing the potential for experimentation and discovery in the natural world of teachers' classroom narratives. Nias (1991) presents a position toward this research which seems to best explain my attitude toward teachers as researchers, when she says it is "deliberate, systematic and rigorous enquiry by practitioners into their own practices, understandings and situations. Its aim is the improvement of these practices, understandings and situations, so that pupils' education can be enhanced and the overall quality of schools' educational provision can be improved" (p. 24). Nias believes there is a direct overlap between "teacher research" and "action research," and the reasons she presents for choosing the former are ones with which I strongly agree. First, teacher inquiries do not always lead to action (certainly not immediate action), but may enhance understanding or change attitudes very slowly as teachers experiment, think, and talk about new ideas. Second, teacher inquiry does not always conform to the classic action research cycle of "plan-act-observe-reflect-revise-plan;" in fact, it is often a messier and more complex process than this plan suggests.

Nias believes that teacher research is a medium through which researchers can assist practitioners to find and express a professional voice by helping them develop self-confidence. She believes the only way to move forward in the field of educational research lies "in individual's willingness to experiment and to sustain any dialogue that may result" (p. 34). She also reaffirms one of the components of my research design as she reports that the existence of a group of teachers which meets regularly with a common purpose provides its members with the opportunity and usually the obligation to share their attempts at improving their own classroom practices. In conclusion, Nias states: "The process of doing research fosters among teachers the capacity to perceive, to understand and to make judgements from within and about complex practical situations, it increases their interpersonal skills, especially as communicators, and it strengthens their belief in their own efficacy" (p. 36).

Like Nias, Britton (1987) believes that inquiry in a classroom context is a process of discovery for teachers and a "quiet form of research" in which teachers need time to reflect, draw inferences, and plan further inquiry. He presents an interesting analysis of educational inquiry, suggesting that it can take three forms: regular classroom teaching, development, and basic research. Britton says: "Teaching is something we *do*; research is something we *know*; development is the process by which we bring this kind of knowing into relation with this kind of doing" (p. 18). Teaching, development, and research are thus seen as "interrelated modes of inquiry and sources of knowledge on a widening scale of applicability" (p. 19). Britton further recognizes the importance of researchers assisting teachers to recognize new strategies and to apply them in their classroom situations.

Davis (1987) presents a strong argument for teacher research when she discusses how teachers can achieve personal power through a process of theory building. She states: "Most importantly, we teachers should not be trying to simply *apply* Piaget et al.; we should be exploring the same issues as academics in ways useful to *us*, which is just what Piaget did for himself"

(p. 21). Davis believes that the way in which teachers gain power is by building theories about personal actions and intentions, teaching practices, learning, and social change. She suggests that teachers will develop their own theories by articulating experiences, reflecting on these experiences, and then generalizing from the basis of both personal experience and that of others. Such a process can be facilitated by the assistance of a researcher who is interested and involved with the teachers.

"Collaboration" is the cornerstone of teacher research, and appears to be a major theme identified by many writers (Goswami & Stillman, 1987). Research collaborations are also discussed extensively by Comber &Hancock (1987), Lieberman (1986), Levine (1992), Lally, et al. (1992). While these authors demonstrate that partnerships between teachers and researchers can be structured in a variety of ways, there does seem to be a growing belief in the field that such research collaboration is the key for encouraging change in our schools. In describing his view of naturalistic collaborative research, Cairney (1987) says the teacher works in collaboration with the researcher, both taking on different, but complementary roles and both exploring problems of significance to themselves and to the wider educational community. In his view, this approach involves systematic collection and analysis of data by both teacher and researcher, with the results being important to both the teacher and the researcher.

Dean (1991) cites the views of John Elliot, who stresses that the way teachers are best encouraged to question personal practice is by seeking to improve their understanding of classroom problems rather than to impose instant solutions upon them. Dean and Elliot also emphasize the importance of using small action research groups to meet this goal. Dean says that these groups are most productive when they are composed of teachers from more than one school. She also suggests that these groups benefit from the participation of advisors, consultants, or researchers who are working members of the group, not experts who direct and supervise the teachers in their day-to-day practices.

McDonald (1989) urges those involved in educational research partnerships to avoid intensive frequent observation-feedback processes. He suggests that "the problem with this strategy is that its directness is as threatening as it is powerful" (p. 210). McDonald's conclusion is particularly interesting to me because I chose not to include formal "participant observation" strategies in my research design. The research participants involved in my study live distances up to two hundred kilometers away from me and I believed that the time involved in traveling would make it impossible to spend the amount of quality time in their classrooms that would allow me to build the type of rapport that is required for this strategy to be effective. However, in spite of these practical logistics, I also intuitively sensed that teachers would feel less threatened and would be more likely to experiment freely with new ideas if they did not have the pressure of an "outsider," however unobtrusive. In retrospect, I also believe this was an appropriate decision, and was pleased to see it supported in the literature.

Summary

My research is based on a world view referred to as the **Constructivist Perspective** - a stance in which the individual creates reality and makes meaning of experience through a process of social interaction. The research paradigm is also known as "constructivist," focusing on events and actions of individuals in the natural world. This **Naturalistic Constructivist Research** recognizes the multiple perspectives of the research participants as they collaborate with the researcher to make sense of their worlds. The research method is a **Narrative Approach**, which recognizes the voices of each of the teachers as they tell stories and anecdotes of their teaching and learning experiences. The narrative method suggests that these stories can not only change basic practices, but they have the power to change beliefs and "self" through a collaborative process. The model created is based on **Teacher Research**, in which the focus is on teacher volunteers from different schools who agree to meet regularly in small group collaborative sessions to share their experiences as they attempt to change pedagogical practice by experimenting with an innovative teaching approach.

CHAPTER IV

TELLING THE RESEARCH DESIGN STORY

> One's research career is unmistakably a reflection of the person that he or she has been. Of all the possibilities, one raises only certain questions, pursues only certain approaches, and reads the results in only certain ways.
>
> R. Brimfield, J. Roderick, K. Yamamoto, 1983, p. 15

Introduction

This research was constructed to study the ways in which individual teachers carry back into their classrooms innovative ideas from an in-service workshop. It is also an attempt to better understand the deeper issues of how these initial pedagogical changes can lead to meaningful and enduring changes in the beliefs and practices of teachers. There is no "one right way" to proceed with such a study. While it is essential that one begin with a clear plan, a researcher must remain open to the possibilities that may lead him or her to procedures that can provide deeper insight into the issues involved than those originally planned. This is the way in which I approached my research study and the way in which it emerged and evolved from the beginning research design.

In this chapter I present the overall research design, as well as the story of the research in progress. I begin by discussing my role as researcher and continue by outlining the data collection and analysis procedures that constitute the research design. I present the information in narrative format, integrating my voice with voices of other researchers, and with those of the research participants as they reflected on the procedures in which they were involved.

My Role as Researcher: Facilitator and Storyteller

Macrorie (1987) presents light-hearted, but insightful, advice to researchers, as he says: "Expect to make mistakes. Use any uncommon, sophisticated sense or method that will help you do your job of searching, or any simple kitchen sense or method. Go for something you want and that will make a difference to you, your peers, and other people you don't know yet" (p. 38). I believe that this type of flexibility best serves a constructivist research project. For me, this was the case.

While I laid out plans carefully, some certainly did not materialize; for example, the colleague who volunteered to serve as a "second reader" (Craig, 1991) for my research journal moved away. As well, unforeseen circumstances resulted in changes to our original planning schedule; for example, we were forced to cancel our December meeting because the teachers were just too busy with school concerts and personal celebrations. However, other learning opportunities fortuitously appeared - Rachael brought print information from a "Portfolio Workshop" to share with us during one session; I discovered Jones's (1993) latest research book on "staff development" during the writing of my dissertation and it clearly outlined the facilitative researcher role that I had adopted. I tried to take advantage of these opportunities as they arose during my research study and added these materials and ideas to the collection and analysis of data.

I found it confusing to sort out the differences in the researcher role in terms of "insider/outsider", "observed/observer", or "object/subject" positions. Van Manen (1990) provides a helpful interpretation, as he says that in human science research, "objectivity and subjectivity are not mutually exclusive categories" as they "both find their meaning and significance in the oriented (i.e., personal) relation that the researcher establishes with the 'object' of his or her inquiry" (p. 20). Therefore, "objectivity" means that the researcher is oriented to the object and remains "true to the object." In terms of my study, I consider the "objects" to be the "question under investigation" and the "experiences of the teachers" in the study. Therefore, I will attempt to show, describe, and interpret these objects while remaining faithful to them - aware that I can be easily misled or side-tracked by irrelevant elements. "Subjectivity" means that the researcher must be as perceptive, insightful, and discerning as possible in order to show or disclose the object in its full richness and its greatest depth. Van Manen depicts subjectivity as strength in one's orientation to the object of study "*in a unique and personal way* - while avoiding the danger of becoming arbitrary, self-indulgent, or of getting captivated and carried away by our unreflected preconceptions" (p. 20). I consider these concepts to be fundamentally important in guiding my research quest.

Generally, my role during the collection of data was that of a responsive facilitator. I was a facilitator, similar to the one described in the participatory research of Lally, et al. (1992). In reality I was an "outsider," but I was also the source of new ideas for the teachers, and did "act as a critical friend," helping the teachers by constructively challenging their current assumptions about practice. For example, I challenged their negative assumptions about field trips, made suggestions for alternative methods of conducting them, and used anecdotes from personal experience to express other possibilities. On one occasion I provided teachers with a theoretical book on "emergent literacy," as well as practical suggestions for setting up a "writing center." Another time, I encouraged Brad to incorporate a domestic play area while doing a "home project," exploring with him the benefits of using real materials to foster experiential learning with his students.

Jones (1993) outlines the role of a "facilitator" in collaborative research partnerships, as one who invigorates teachers, so much so that they "may start to make waves" (p. 140). At times during the study this certainly did happen. Some of Brad's colleagues were critical of his explorations with a different teaching approach in their traditional school environment and, on another occasion, Rachael assertively challenged her principal's timetable requirements. While Jones believes that it is the responsibility of facilitators to be supportive, warm, and caring, she emphatically states: "Facilitation without challenge risks wimpiness" (p. 138). I adopted this position as a facilitator, and encouraged the participants to respond in a similar way. During the initial data collection period, I questioned Brad's notion of a holiday theme composed of what I believed were "contrived connections." This set the stage for reciprocal challenges, as happened when Ashley rejected my suggestion that group sizes of three may be more effective than groups of four as the students conducted classroom research.

Jones (1993) provides practical suggestions for researchers who are acting in a facilitative role (pp. 140-145). It is important for facilitators to acknowledge their position outside the power structure in order to be free of the need to engage in power struggles. The facilitator role is to be a "helper, not a rescuer." Researcher responses can be empowering when they build directly on teachers' strengths and credit their capacity for critical thinking.

Jones cautions facilitators not to "criticize and tell" when "affirming and asking" is more appropriate. She says it may be more productive to look for convergence between your values and the teacher's values, and if this is not possible, it is wise to support those of the teacher. She advises research facilitators to pay attention to the teachers' needs by respecting their personal problems and system realities. And most importantly, Jones encourages research facilitators to become "collectors and broadcasters of stories."

Although Jones' book was not published until after the collection of my original research data, I do think I was generally aware of these pitfalls and was careful to foster and maintain a positive interpersonal relationship with the teachers. In my role as discussion leader, I generally guided their conversation without expressing my opinion on issues, unless they directly asked me to do so. For example, when the teachers asked me to give them an "update on the Project Approach and what the phases are all about," I presented a "mini-lecture" summarizing the approach. I frequently asked questions like, "What will you do next?" or "How do you feel about that?" or "Can you tell me more about it?" I often paraphrased their comments during the conversation, reflecting back to them what I thought I heard them say (It sounds as if you decided not to do Phase I for this project) and what I perceived their feelings to be (It must be frustrating to have to deal with the intrusions of a Christmas concert). I tried to remain as non-invasive, non-judgmental and non-directive as possible.

I listened to their stories and told my stories, discovering they were most interested in anecdotes of my teaching experiences. In reviewing the transcripts, I found that I frequently used anecdotes to explain a concept; for example, I told a short story about sharing a "floor graph" with a colleague to encourage her to use manipulative materials in her classroom. The point I was making was that we can encourage change and build liaisons between teachers in direct and practical ways. I also shared parts of my personal life - once bragging about my daughter's grades in university and my youngest son's new job and, on another occasion, recounting my skiing adventures with my accomplished eldest son. I encouraged each person to express his or her point of view and, when an individual did not join in the conversation, I often asked directly for his or her input. I encouraged and participated in group problem solving - one time we had a lengthy discussion on how to organize day plans in a more flexible way, and another time we emotionally debated the pros and cons of Christmas concerts. I distributed reading materials that were brought in by the teachers, and generally supported them with empathetic feedback as they expressed the agonies and ecstasies of classroom teaching.

I maintained the same position as I responded to their dialogue journals, affirming them for their willingness to risk and to make mistakes in the process of exploration, making suggestions when appropriate, and pointing out to them pedagogical accomplishments and/or changes that I observed when reading about their experiences. Brad said:

> My journal is private so you really have to trust the person that's reading it - like I really trusted you. And I was glad for the comments that you gave back, too, because you've been in lots of these situations before and you have a lot of good ideas. You always made me think.

Connelly & Clandinin (1990) present an interesting interpretation of researcher-teacher role descriptions, as they say each participant, researcher, or teacher is engaged in "living, telling, retelling, and reliving their stories as the narrative inquiry proceeds" (p. 9). Throughout the research process, the oral and written stories were restoried and changed as they were exchanged.

Therefore, one's role as research facilitator is a responsive one in which there is a need to respond sensitively and intelligently to the stories of the participants, both in conversation and in writing. There was repetition of ideas, but also slight variations in the teachers' perceptions as they retold the stories. As Brad told the story of his first project, he was rather unsure about its effectiveness in some areas. As time went on, and he re-examined the project, it seemed to become more successful in his mind. As I recognized these changing perceptions, I pointed them out to the teachers.

Each discussion group session seemed to have a unique tone. During the first one, the participants were tentative and full of questions, unsure of themselves and of each other. The second session was replete with negative and emotional outbursts, as some of the teachers lamented the many reasons why they were experiencing difficulty. The final session before Christmas was volatile. There were highs and lows expressed, but I sensed that teachers were more willing to risk by "disagreeing in agreeable ways" as they exchanged ideas. Marie left the study before the fourth session and Brad was unable to attend this meeting. Perhaps this was the reason why there was more intimacy among Rachael, Ashley, and me during the session. Ashley genuinely voiced concerns and asked for advice, revealing some basic insecurities. The fifth session was energetic and positive as the teachers enthusiastically reported successes and told the stories of their many projects. The last session was a more reflective one, in which the teachers were thoughtfully considering upcoming projects, discussing personal beliefs, and talking their way to sense making as they examined what they had done over the past months.

Because of the diverse nature of these sessions, it was important for me to quickly assess the tone of the session and to authentically respond to the moods of the teachers in ways that I believed would be helpful to them. Ironically, I was largely unaware of what was happening during each session, as it was happening. Only in retrospect, as I reviewed the transcripts, was I able to understand these nuances in the dialogue. This speaks to the need for facilitators to develop an intuitive ability to "reflect in action" and to reflect with "mindfulness." Although I am generally pleased with the way in which I facilitated the discussions during the sessions, I might have been more sensitive to the teachers' underlying assumptions. This perception is precipitated by Ashley's comment, as she reflected on my role in the study:

> Sometimes a teacher really wants to try something new, but she thinks, "Forget it. It's too much work." Donna's research kind of forced us into it. That's why I wanted to get involved in this research because I really did want to try something new. I thought that maybe, if I'm reporting to someone or talking to people about it, I might have a better chance of doing it.

Ashley's self-imposed accountability to me as facilitator was not an intended element of my role as a collaborative researcher. While I recognize that Ashley did not mean this comment to be derogatory or vindictive, her interpretation shows how easy it is to play an unintentioned role when interacting in dialogue with others. This disciplinary role is certainly inconsistent with that of facilitation and one of which I was unaware during the initial data collection period. Perhaps it reveals something meaningful about Ashley's interpretation of professional learning, just as it does about my role as researcher.

Carter (1993) reminds researchers that the participating teachers **own** their own stories **and** their meanings. She says a narrative researcher can only serve by getting his or her message across to the larger society and by helping teacher-researchers to come to know their own stories. She cautions researchers to recognize their power in narrating the stories authored by the teachers and to carefully decide what to tell and what to leave out, as what we tell and how we tell it is a revelation of what we believe, thus having a profound impact on the research participants. Connelly & Clandinin (1990) discuss the problem of the multiple "I's", stressing that the "I" can speak as "researcher, teacher, man or woman, commentator, research participant, narrative critic, and as theory builder" (p. 9). Being aware of this problem, I felt it was important to provide opportunities for multiple perspectives on the meaning of each story to emerge and to become part of the research story.

I was actively involved in the research study. From the beginning, I was moved by the statement of Yamamoto as she states: "I am not untouched by or detached from the process and the product of my research. Therefore, I must engage in research with an appreciation of the fact that I shall emerge from it slightly changed as a person" (Brimfield, Roderick & Yamamoto, 1983, p. 14). As facilitator and storyteller, I feel I was able to help the teachers make sense of what was occurring in their classrooms by vicariously sharing in their experiences and by negotiating meaning in a dialectic process of discovery for both myself and the teachers. While it is important to approach naturalistic research in a systematic way, the success of this perspective lies in an understanding that knowing is an individual act requiring both personal judgment and commitment. When Brad wrote in his journal, "Thanks for the idea. I never thought of it that way before," or when Ashley remarked, "What you said in my journal last week really makes sense," or when Rachael expressed her appreciation for my part in helping her deal with her frustrations, then I felt greatly rewarded in my research role.

Collecting the Data: Research Tools and Procedures

Personal experience, represented through language, was the primary source of my research data. Hertzler says: "The key and basic symbolism of man is language. All the other symbol systems can be interpreted only by means of language" (cited in Charon, 1979, p. 44). It is through language, defined in interaction, and used to describe to others and to ourselves what we observe, think, and imagine, that we construct reality. Gitlin (1990) stresses the importance of researcher-teacher interactions as he states: "If research is going to help develop practitioners' voices, as opposed to silencing them, researchers must engage in dialogue with practitioners at both the level of question-posing and the interpretation of findings" (p. 446). Therefore, I will discuss "conversation" and "dialogue journalling" as the two basic tools for data collection and will also present an overview of the design procedures as they evolved. As well, I will discuss other emergent sources of data collection.

Conversation

Group meetings and open-ended interviews provided me with the primary sources of conversational data. I use "conversation" in a way similar to that described by van Manen (1990, pp. 66-68, 97-100). He presents two main functions of the conversational interview, which are similar to my rationale for its use. First, it is a means for exploring and gathering narrative material that serves as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of the phenomenon being explored - in this study, the new pedagogical strategies with which they were experimenting. Second, it is a way to develop a conversational relationship with the participating teachers about the meaning of their experiences - in this study, the meaning of professional learning, their own development, and personal change. In further describing the research conversation, van Manen states:

> A conversation is not just a personal relation between two or more people who are involved in the conversation. A conversation may start off as a mere chat, and in fact, this is usually the way that conversations come into being. But then, when gradually a certain topic of mutual interest emerges, the speakers become in a sense animated by the notion to which they are now both oriented, a true conversation comes into being. (p. 98)

When conversations or open-ended interviews are being interpreted from a narrative perspective, Polkinghorne (1922) believes that it is important to allow the respondents to continue in their own way until they indicate that they have completed what they wish to say. He states: "This context is different from the typical survey interview context, in which the interview is controlled by the interviewer who asks specific questions and intervenes when the answers are 'off-track" (p. 164). If this open-ended approach is used, he says interviewees are more likely to relate anecdotes and stories. I found this to be the case in our conversations and there are many rich stories and anecdotes embedded in the dialogue of both the group and individual sessions.

Adopting these approaches to conversation, I did not use scripted questions to structure the dialogue, although I often had issues or topics that I wanted to discuss with the teachers. I made notes before our meetings and interviews, and the teachers also often brought suggestions for topic discussions, or were aware of stories they wanted to share with the group prior to the sessions. During sessions with the teachers, I kept notes recording my "reflections-in-action," even though I tape-recorded all the group meetings and some of the interviews. Some teachers also kept personal notes during the session. All this note-taking pointed out to me the importance of the written word, even in the context of oral meaning-making.

We originally planned to meet every three or four weeks and, at the first session, tried to arrange a schedule for the eight-month period set aside for group collaboration. It was soon evident that this was impossible; we all had busy personal and professional schedules and needed to be flexible in order to meet all our needs. Instead, we decided to meet once a month and to formalize the date, place, and time for the next meeting at the session just prior to it. However, as the study progressed some additional rescheduling was also required, and we eventually participated in six formal research group sessions. Individual interviews were not formally scheduled, but were organized as I felt necessary during the research study.

There was a great deal of travel time involved as well; thus, we decided to meet in the different schools of the teachers so everyone would be able to remain in his or her own community for some of the sessions. In addition, the teachers were anxious to see each other's schools and classrooms and this arrangement gave them an opportunity to do so. We did manage to meet in all the schools, with the exception of Brad's school. His community is the most remote and he kindly agreed to drive to other locations for all the sessions. The teachers often provided snacks in their staff rooms and once we shared a pizza supper. During these social times we continued to share teaching stories, and the informal atmosphere relaxed the group members, building group cohesion and a sense of community. One of Brad's teaching colleagues joined the group during one session. Peggy was warmly welcomed and spontaneously joined in the conversation.

All the conversational group sessions and some of the open-ended one-on-one interviews were transcribed from the audio tapes; however, the informal conversations were not. I had many informal "talks" with the teachers, either spontaneous or planned, in person or on the telephone, and I made notes in my research journal recording the nature of these conversations. Other conversations made their way into my research data in an extemporaneous manner. I sometimes met socially with principals, superintendents, and colleagues who were aware of my study because the participating teachers had previously shared their role in the research. I had interesting informal conversations with these individuals and typically gained new insight into the practices of the teachers.

Journal Writing

Journalling, as a personal exploration of lived experience through writing, can provide a rich source of data in naturalistic research (Janesick, 1983; Carswell, 1988; Edwards & Craig, 1990). In recording and reflecting on daily experience, individuals reveal inner thoughts that assist them in making meaning of their everyday life experiences. A research *journal*, whether it is written by the researcher or by the research participants, is both a record of that person's professional choices and a reflection of his or her identity as a person in the now moment of the journal entry. On the other hand, *journalling* is an active process in which writers explore the ongoingness of experience and open themselves up to new possibilities of change through professional learning and personal development (Fox, 1987). Craig (1983) describes her view of journalling, as she states:

> One reconstructs moments of the past, not in order to wallow in the emotions associated with that (because some emotions can be very painful), but in order to let the energy of understanding that you've coped with those emotions take you forward to look with deepened insight into the future. (pp. 374-375)

Carswell (1988) suggests that through journalling, we "make discoveries at the point of utterance, insights that become apparent and take shape as you write" (p. 105). Janesick (1981) believes that teacher journals represent every variation of being - "thinking, acting, feeling, daydreaming, rejoicing, regretting, doubting, and self-accusing" (p. 2) and further discusses how journal writing can become a form of catharsis as individuals vent their feelings. However, Janesick also recognizes that journalling is not an effective strategy for everyone and cautions that it is a time consuming technique requiring creativity, discipline, patience and willingness to reflect back on what is said and done in the classroom on a regular basis.

Craig identifies the 3 R's of journalling as w**R**iting, **R**e-reading, and **R**esponding. This process involves active reflectivity, a process that invites one to stand outside the center of the reflection, to look and listen to the words on the page in a new way, and then to respond by writing new reflections. I encouraged the teachers to write regularly in a teacher journal, prepared a handout of guidelines, and invited them to read a paper on journalling (Morrison, 1991), discussing the possible benefits of the journalling process. Throughout the research study, I also kept a personal teacher journal reflecting on my experiences as a college instructor, and found it an excellent self-assessment tool. By participating in practical career-oriented journalling, I was able to share the experience with the teachers in a more personal way,

I promoted a research procedure for dialogue journalling (Yinger, 1985). It involves intensive writing, re-reading and reflection, and *dialogue with another person*. Fulwiler (1982) says dialectic responses can become conversational in nature, as the researcher-respondent asks questions, clarifies points, extends meanings, discusses issues of common concern, and reveals some personal attributes and qualities. I also shared my personal experiences in their journals, thus reinforcing the belief of the writer in his or her trustworthiness, and freeing him or her to be equally open in expressing personal anecdotes and feelings; rapport developed as a result of these social relationships. In discussing this phenomenon, Nystrand & Wiederspiel (1988), quote Kelly who says: "To the extent that one person construes the construction process of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other person" (p. 121). The respondent's role, say the authors, is to crawl in the skin of the writer and try to see the world the way the writer sees it. I feel the dialogue journalling experience helped me to better know and understand the teachers, as they shared more personal anecdotes and feelings in their journals than they did in the company of their research colleagues.

The teachers and I decided that they would give me their journals each week, and I would respond and return them, aiming at a one week turn-around period. This procedure was most effective with Brad, as there was a contact person available to facilitate these exchanges. The other teachers initially sent them back and forth using the postal service, but when this proved unsuccessful, they simply kept them and gave them to me at our regular group sessions and I then returned them by mail. This dialogue process was less effective because of the long periods of time between exchanges. I originally planned for the teachers to share their journals with each other as well during the data collection period, but this was also logistically impossible. However, they did bring journals to each group session and often referred to them, using written anecdotes as catalysts for discussion.

Dialogue journalling, a source of data collection in my research, was more personally rewarding for some teachers than for others. Brad found it a beneficial learning experience, especially because of the dialectic nature of the process. He followed the suggested guidelines meticulously, read and re-read his entries many times during and after the study was completed. Brad also included diagrams of room arrangements and sketches of crafts and other projects to better explain what he was doing. Ashley also kept a regular journal, but used it in a more personal way. She wrote spontaneously, often asking question after question, and then answering all her questions. Near the end of the study Ashley completed journal entries more sporadically, and then began to summarize her thoughts in weekly submissions. Rachael had sometimes kept a journal in the past; however, in the fall she kept a daily teacher journal for the dual purpose of this research and a graduate university course in which she was enrolled. This became an interesting three-way written conversation, as the university professor, Rachael and I all read and commented on each other's responses. Halfway through the study, the process "dried up" for Rachael and she experimented with tape-recording her thoughts. Marie simply felt the task too time-consuming and personally demanding. She completed only eleven entries, all during the first month of the study.

Craig (1984) encourages researchers to journal throughout the research process as it provides the avenue for an unpremeditated flow of ideas, responses, feelings, and reactions. She comments on her own experiences doing doctoral research:

> The evolving role being bestowed upon me by the participants in the study was recorded and reflected on. In time, when the daily log entries were read in periodic feedbacks, patterns emerged and new realizations occurred. The writer came into contact with the inner movement of her thoughts and feelings and, I found in this study, with the inner movement of the thoughts and feelings of the key informant. (p. 9)

My personal research journalling experience is unique. I began by writing on a regular basis, but then the writing became very sporadic. After some introspection, I realized that the **teachers'** journals had become **my** journals, a joint record of our shared experience, thereby reducing the need for me to write "just for myself". However, my journal does contain interesting anecdotes and records of my thoughts - summarized readings, pasted cut-outs from magazines, tid-bits hastily written on restaurant napkins during conversations with friends over lunch, copious notes from workshop and seminar presentations, quotes from radio programs scribbled on the back of envelopes, and sometimes "legitimate" journal reflections, written with care and attention to detail. This unorthodox journal is a rich source of personal research data.

Other Data Sources and Procedures

Participant Observation

During a previously scheduled Project Approach Workshop, presented by Dr. Sylvia Chard in July, 1991, I took extensive field notes, using the techniques outlined by Spradley (1980), and also later discussed Dr. Chard's perceptions of the workshop with her. My role was that of "moderate participant" (p. 60) in the workshop experience. At the end of the three day workshop, Dr. Chard and I explained the nature of my research to the twenty participants. I presented them with a written overview of potential benefits and possible responsibilities, along with an invitation to participate in the study. All the workshop participants responded by completing a form and a personal profile; four individuals volunteered to work in the research project.

Following the workshop, I collected individual assessments on this in-service activity from the participants, summarized my field notes, wrote personal interpretations, and later elicited more in-depth assessments from the teachers involved in the study. In August I contacted the volunteers and three of the initial four people made a commitment to the study; however, I assured them that they were under no obligation to continue if they felt the process was not personally beneficial to them. During the summer, one other teacher, who had experienced the Project Approach in a university class, also volunteered to join the research study. These teachers were in three diverse schools in varying sized communities, widely separated in distance. Although I realized it would be difficult to implement my research design in the detail I had originally planned, I felt that, in the tradition of naturalistic teacher research, I was obligated to meet the needs of these teachers as I conducted the research.

I presented a university seminar during the summer before beginning the group sessions. I am reminded of the Zen saying, "To teach is to learn twice," and I feel that by teaching this course I developed a deeper understanding of the Project Approach. During the winter of that same school year I was invited to present a two and one half day Project Approach Workshop for the school system that employs Brad. This provided both Brad and me with new insights about his teaching experimentations. Neither of these opportunities was planned as part of my research project; however, my role in each of these activities could be classified as "complete participation" using the participant observation technique. I found both presentations to be valuable personal learning experiences.

Three times during the data collection period I was in the area where Brad taught, and I "dropped in" to visit his class. These spontaneous interactions were most beneficial in helping me to understand Brad's teaching situation. The teachers also visited each other's classrooms when the sessions were held in their schools. We all enjoyed this opportunity to observe the ways in which different teachers organize their rooms and materials and present visual displays of the children's work, both inside and outside their classrooms. These project work products are also a source of research information. School tours became a highlight of our first visits to the various schools. Brad and his colleague, Peggy, also observed in two city schools, as a personal professional learning activity, and then shared their experiences with us during one of the group sessions. Information and interpretations from all these forms of "participant observation" are entangled with the data collection and provide a rich and realistic perspective to the study.

Other Materials

Rachael completed two graduate level university courses during the data collection period, one in the fall semester and an independent study on the Project Approach in the winter semester. Because her topics reflected the professional learning in which she was involved, she shared the papers she wrote for these courses with me and these documents became part of the research data. Rachael also produced some audiotape journals. At the end of the year of data collection, Brad and Ashley asked their students to write about their school projects. These letters were sent to me and provide a unique interpretation and evaluation of the activities by those most directly involved. Brad brought photographs, taken during his first project with the children, to one of the group sessions. These became the source of a lively and focused discussion. He also took videotapes of some class discussions and field trip excursions.

I received several unsolicited letters and other items from individuals with whom the teachers had been involved - a letter of recognition from Ashley's principal, a copy of a letter of appreciation from a parent of a child in Brad's classroom, a letter of congratulations on Brad's accomplishments from his superintendent, and a copy of a school board report in the local newspaper acknowledging Brad's teaching competence. As well, the teachers and I often wrote to one another for a variety of reasons during the study, and the letters also provided another way of documenting the development of these teachers.

Voices of the Teachers Assessing the Research Techniques

For research purposes, the teachers' journals provided an excellent source of data. However, I was also interested in the teachers' perceptions of the success of the conversational group sessions and of the journalling process as a means of personal and/or professional learning. During our last regularly scheduled group meeting, I asked them to discuss these procedures. Following is a summary of the resulting dialogue. I also included some comments previously made in their journals.

Rachael: My need for dialogue intensified as I tried to reconcile the discrepancies between my beliefs and practices. Conversation with colleagues was so important during this time of uncertainty in my teaching.

Brad: If we had not had these group meetings, I would probably have forgotten about trying something new the second week in September. After the first session, I felt a lot better about the Project Approach. Voicing concerns and frustrations seemed to empty my head of many nagging doubts.

Ashley: The group sessions are good because you're responsible to three or four people and that encourages you to try things.

Rachael: I think it's important to keep it going with follow up. You really need to experiment and then go back and think whether or not you're on the right track. You need to talk and find out what went wrong - by trial and error. It shouldn't be sink or swim. When there's a follow-up, you can kind of wade in more gently and if the water gets cold, you can back out and then go back in later.

Brad: Each one of us does things a different way and these meetings gave us a chance to find out what others do. We spent valuable time sharing joys and concerns, as well as discussing philosophies and teaching methods. It was super!

Rachael: When we meet once a month, it gives us new ideas to build on. I think that makes sense. You don't have to absorb everything new all at once and you get a good foundation. It's great to share.

Donna: I would like you to talk about which works best for you in your professional growth - the talking or the writing?

Ashley: The actual journal writing helped me, especially in the beginning. It was neat, because it got me thinking about my problems. I seemed to come up with at least one idea about how to work out each problem as I was writing about it. It really gets you thinking about what you're doing. It also makes me look back and see what I did - ideas about what I would try next time, or "This is a great lesson." When I had to write a journal in university, I thought, "Just show me one teacher that actually does self-reflection at the end of a lesson. It's just one more weird thing." But now it makes sense. I don't like doing organized and logical writing, so journalling allows me the freedom to just write.

But I think that the discussion groups were best for me, because of the immediate feedback you get. By the time you returned my journal and I got your feedback, it wasn't the same. I ended up with so many more ideas during our group sessions. I'd think, "Well, Brad tried this and Rachael has tried that and maybe I'll give it a try, too." It was great - especially because there was just the four of us. Sometimes the ideas just clicked for me and the lights went flashing on.

Brad: The sessions were good for me, but I liked journalling, too, because it's nice to have that written record. When you talk, you can't always remember what happened the day before; when you have it written down, you can look back. Last night, I sat down and read everything since September, and it was interesting! I know that I read it before, but lots of things I had forgotten, like your suggestion to have kids who could write, scribe for other kids who couldn't. That just hit me last night when I read it. Donna's comments were very helpful and usually provoked both thought and action. I agree with you that the reflection process is as important as the product. First, writing in my journal is an act to focus my attention. Second, my re-reading and writing a response to this second reading, provides me with an insight into myself and my class. Third, getting the professional feedback confirms and affirms many of my thoughts and gives me valuable direction. I value Donna's opinions.

Rachael: I think my journal gave me an outlet for my tension. Once Donna suggested, in her feedback comments, that maybe I would be able to file away negative thoughts after having written them to a receptive listener. I tend to agree.

Ashley: It's great when you're having a bad day and you just want to write. You just want to say things about your colleagues, like you have a disagreement with another teacher, or you have a fit in the hallway one day. You can write it and get it off your chest. It really gets you thinking. If it's in the back of your mind, you can just leave it there, but if you write it down, then you are forced to keep thinking about it and to try to solve the problems.

Brad: I can go home and talk to my wife, and she listens but she doesn't really understand. When you write it down, you don't want to just crumple up the paper and throw it away. You want to keep it, but I think I should keep mine in a diary with a lock! Everyone in my school is curious about my journal and I told one teacher that I didn't mind if she thumbed through it. And before I knew it, another teacher was reading it. I thought, "No. This is mine!" and I waited for an interruption in the conversation and pulled it away from her. The lady gave me a look like - "What are you hiding from me?"

Rachael: Once I wrote a journal that a university professor read, and even though I knew I was really writing it for myself, when she made negative comments, it really hurt. I found that you never criticized my journals and I appreciated that. When that professor put down my writing, I thought, "You'll never really know what I'm doing or thinking ever again." Because I had to write what she wanted me to write, I just didn't have enough energy to write for me anymore.

After Christmas, I had a major problem with writing. I'd just sit there and couldn't do it. I'd get up and I'd have something to eat, and I'd come back and I couldn't get the first sentence down. Maybe I'm just journalled out. Maybe, I'm mentally tired from **having** to do it. Before, I would write down the things I was doing and questioning and I was trying so hard to make things fit. Perhaps I needed a break from thinking. I didn't want to argue with myself and I didn't want to face some of the things that weren't the way I wanted them to be.

Because I'm having such a hard time writing, I started tape recording. But, the problem is that when I write, I write and re-write, re-read, and then carry on. So I had to keep re-winding and then going forward. It was interesting listening to what I said, but I prefer my writing as opposed to talking. I think it makes far more sense. If I don't like it when it's written, then I can erase it; whereas, when you speak, in a public domain, you can't call those words back and the tone of your voice sometimes says much more than the actual words.

Donna: Perhaps it's good to keep those writings that you want to erase. In reading them back later, you may understand better what you were going through at the time.

Brad: It takes a lot of energy to write regularly, but you get more of that energy back after you've done it. From what I read last night, I can really see how far I've come from where I was in the beginning! In September, I was so wound up going into grade one that I wasn't paying much attention to the kids.

Rachael: That's interesting. For me, September was such a frustrating time that I won't ever bother to read the journal from those days.

The above dialogue demonstrates divergent opinions and feelings on the effectiveness of different aspects of the group sessions and of the journalling process. However, generally the teachers believed that the group follow-up sessions provided a necessary incentive for their exploration of the Project Approach. As well, when the teachers wrote in their journals, they found it beneficial, and they all believed that a trusting and supportive dialogue partner was important; however, they all also recognized that regular journal writing is a highly personal and laborious task.

Analyzing the Research Data

After adopting a constructivist research position, it was important for me to provide ongoing opportunities for the multiple perspectives of the teachers to be shared and interpreted by one another. It was equally important to analyze the dialogues of experience in order to obtain their socially constructed meanings. The conversational nature of the group setting allowed the teachers to constantly interact with one another and to spontaneously respond to one another's thoughts and ideas. As well, the dialogue journal gave them the opportunity to story and restory their experience as I read and responded to their entries and they read, responded and wrote back to me. Through this cyclical process the data were being interpreted and re-interpreted as the study progressed. I also listened to the audio-tapes following each session, making notes on my interpretations, and sometimes I re-introduced problematic issues and recurring dilemmas during the next session. After the audio-tapes were all transcribed, I listened to and read them again, making additional interpretive comments during this process.

Although I did invite the teachers to re-interpret transcribed dialogue from the group sessions, I felt no need to have the journal entries and responses re-interpreted by the participants, because of the intrinsically dialectic nature of the written text and partly because of the repetition of many of these reflections in the dialogue sessions. I used anecdotes from their journals in the construction of longer narratives, and when the meaning was not clear within the shared text, I asked the teachers for clarification. During the data collection period, the journal entries were written between the group sessions, serving a meaning making function following and proceeding the collegial conversations.

Diamond (1991, pp. 103-104) explores *idiographic* and *nomothetic* perspectives as ways of reflecting on narratives. While these contrasting views can be seen as opposite poles of the same construct, they can both be useful in the interpretation of narrative data. Both approaches require the researcher to select and highlight relevant information from the narrative text. I chose significant narrative selections from the transcribed conversational text and from the dialogue journals of the research participants, thereby reconstructing their personal experiences. I then included the teachers in the interpretation of these stories by developing a procedure for them to see the patterns in their stories to better understand the ways in which they create their worlds. Thus, I primarily used an idiographic perspective, in which I focused on ways in which individual teachers understand their personal constructions of reality. However, to a lesser extent I also used a nomothetic approach, sometimes taking a normative perspective to better understand the ideas of the teachers through reference to the generalizations and theoretical statements of others.

In addition, I used an ongoing analytic approach in which the teachers and I interpreted one another's responses both formally and informally during the initial data collection period and later during the analysis of the data. Diamond (1991) refers to this narrative perspective as "analysis as response" and states: "Teachers can be encouraged to think of their teaching experience as a text that they can interpret" (p. 116). I tried to highlight the classroom problems, challenges, and successes and to respond appropriately to the experiences and reflections of the teachers. As the research participants reflected on their interpretations, as well as on my comments about their interpretations, there were additional levels of meaning provided. It was difficult to determine when to end this process and to decide when it was time to stop interpreting the re-interpretations. Such is the nature of conversational data, as reciprocal responses can continue to inform the data.

I originally planned to analyze the data and to complete the research dissertation during the summer of 1992. In rethinking this research agenda, I determined the time line to be too short for the teachers to demonstrate deep and lasting change - change that goes beyond perfunctory practices to demonstrate a more profound impact upon pedagogical beliefs and practices. Hall & Loucks (1976) support my decision, as they report: "Studies have shown that implementing complex innovations requires several years, as teachers work to master new procedures, so that evaluations conducted at the end of the first year are apt to show no significant improvement in the conditions the change is expected to impact" (cited in Morine-Dershimer, 1992, p. 1). Therefore, while the teachers and I periodically "touched base" during the next year, I did not begin formal analysis of the data until the Spring of 1993.

I think the time lapse between the beginning of the data collection period and the re-interpretation of the data two years later was advantageous for me as a researcher, and for the teachers. It provided us both with the opportunity for "sober second thought;" thus, it opened the possibility for a more enduring analysis than may have resulted if the study had been completed after only one year of experimentation with the Project Approach. As the teachers responded to the stories, a year or more after they had authored them, their interpretations contained an insightful blend of the types of reflections discussed by van Manen. Although these interpretations were based primarily on recollective reflection, there was also interactive reflection, as they concomitantly considered their immediate experience and thought about how they had changed their beliefs and practices since the original writing of the text. Furthermore, the teachers seemed also to engage in anticipatory reflection; they used recollective and interactive reflection, thinking about the meaning of the past and present to consider where they may be leading in the future. In this way, their self-analyses represented a unique blend of "reflexive thinking" and "pedagogical thoughtfulness."

In order to extract the narratives embedded within the dialogue of the teachers' conversations, I searched through the conversational transcripts for stories addressing the "Project Approach," for stories depicting professional learning experiences, and for stories focusing on personal or professional change. At the same time I reviewed journal entries addressing these same issues. Sometimes the journal provided "back-up" information to add depth to the stories; other times, the journal entries reflected ideas and thoughts that they later introduced during the group session. The journal seemed to give them an opportunity, both for organizing their thinking before presenting ideas orally to the group, and for further reflection following the group sessions.

Next, I rewrote the stories, using both the transcribed conversational data and the journal data. Sometimes I reconstructed stories from longer dialogue segments, supported and enriched with data from journal reflections and/or untranscribed conversations; sometimes I simply presented the stories embedded within the context of the original dialogue; sometimes I pulled out significant anecdotes that seemed to stand alone to tell a powerful story. Macrorie (1987) suggests that, when interviewers are looking or listening for meaning during conversations, they "don't notice all the torn and ragged edges of the speaker's language;" he also advises researchers that it is sometimes necessary to "paraphrase what's said, or make up sentences that are truer to the source's feelings and beliefs that the words she or he delivered at the moment of being interviewed" (p. 52). While I did some rewriting of the transcribed text to streamline it and to delete extraneous words, it was seldom necessary to change the original texts of Brad and Rachael; however, I often paraphrased Ashley's oral text to remove inconsistencies in thought patterns, to combine sentence fragments, and to present a written text which more accurately represented her ideas.

When I sent these narratives to the teachers for their interpretations, I sometimes sent the same stories to all the teachers for multiple interpretations on that particular story; other times I only sent the story to the teacher who had authored it. This decision was primarily based on my impression of the potential meaningfulness of each narrative to the teachers who participated in the storying experience. The teachers typically responded to all the narrative information that I had sent to them; however, sometimes an individual chose not to respond to a particular story or anecdote. In such a case, I did not solicit a further response.

I assisted the teachers in using a technique adapted from McConaghy (1991, p. 98) to analyze the narrative data. The teachers followed a three-step procedure which began with the teacher reading the story dialogue transcription to get a feeling of what the story is about, thereby arriving at a story topic. Secondly, the teachers re-read the text and asked themselves what the message is for them or what the meaning of the story is for them. Finally, the teachers wrote a one-sentence theme statement of their meaning of this particular narrative. When these were returned to me, I then wrote a personal comment responding to each teacher's interpretation. The analysis of the reconstructed individual project work stories is presented somewhat differently from that of the dialectic stories. While the research participants similarly read and responded to chronological sections of their stories on project work, I synthesized their comments into a final interpretation of their reflections on this experience. I then based my interpretive analysis on all aspects of their stories, as well as insight gained from their biography, initial goals, and student comments.

As a result of this process, I developed representative themes that reflect these multiple interpretations and address the meaning of change in professional learning. Van Manen (1990, pp. 78-97) presents an explanation of "theme," which he says refers to an element which occurs frequently in the text, as well as a thorough discussion of "thematic analysis," which is "the process of recovering themes that are embodied in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work" (p. 78). He also offers theme-like statements about themes, which include: theme is the experience of focus and of meaning; theme formulation is at best a simplification, and theme is a method of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand.

Van Manen continues by stating that themes are the result of the researcher's desire to make sense, representing an openness to something in the process of insightful invention, discovery, and disclosure of meaning. In discussing analytical and thematic interpretations of narrative data (p. 171), van Manen outlines an approach similar to the one that I used in my research. Using this approach, he says one starts with description of some particular life situations and events taken from everyday life, "thus showing the puzzling and depthful nature of a determinate research question." He then suggests that the task is "to follow through with investigative inquiries which the concrete life situation makes problematic." In so doing, van Manen says theme becomes "the hermeneutic tool by way of which the phenomenon under study can be meaningfully understood." I extracted such themes from the multiple interpretations in my study and then I organized them into a framework which addresses the research question.

My point of view is thus presented initially through the explication of stories, but without judgment of the teachers' personal perspectives; however, my personal comments will also provide another interpretation of the teachers' views, and the final theming will synthesize these multiple perspectives. In the end, Carter (1993) says:

> It is important to remember that stories, because of their multiplicity of meanings and resistance to interpretation, teach in ambiguous ways. Indeed, this feature is both the strength and weakness of story as a

> teaching event. Stories convey the multiplicity of ways actions and situations intertwine and thus accurately represent the complex demand of teaching. (p. 10)

Summary of the Research Design

Macrorie's (1987) position supports my research design: "The fear of contaminating an inquiry by touching or interacting with the 'subjects' is often out of place in studying an activity as human as the making of meaning" (p. 56). Therefore, my **role as researcher** was an active one. I was involved with four teacher participants in a mutually supportive experience of collaborative meaning making. I began the research by using a **participant observation** method to study an experiential three day in-service workshop on the "Project Approach." Three teachers from this workshop volunteered to participate in the research; one other interested teacher who had a similar prior experience joined the research group. The group formally met six times during an eight month period to discuss their experimentation with the new approach, and each participant also kept a teacher journal during this time. My research role during this process was one of **responsive facilitator** and **storyteller** to help the teachers reflect on their classroom practice with the aim of increasing their self confidence and self understanding.

The source of data was a text of experiences. I used **conversation** and **journalling** as the primary narrative data collection tools, but also used field notes from my experiences of "participant observation," as well as written documents provided by the participants, students and other interested people.

The written text comprised of reconstructed stories taken mostly from transcribed conversations and dialogue journals, along with some information from informal discussions. The teachers and I interpreted this data primarily from an **idiographic perspective**, although I also used a **nomothetic approach** when analyzing some of the narratives. Both my **responses** to the narrative data, and those of the research participants, were also interpreted and analyzed throughout the research study. As a final step, I used **thematic analysis** to synthesize the findings for a broader audience.

CHAPTER V

SITUATING THE RESEARCH STORY

> As professionals, we should carefully consider the conditions and needs in our own educational settings and, by our choices, take advantage of the opportunity provided to implement the recommendations for change in ways that acknowledge those particular conditions and address those specific needs.
>
> Greta Morine-Dershimer, 1992, p. 9

Introduction

My research story actually has its beginnings in a government initiative presented in a policy titled Program Continuity: Elementary Education in Action (Alberta Education, 1990b). In this chapter, I provide a personal historical account of "Program Continuity," including its present status with Alberta Education. I also provide an overview of the "Project Approach," as an example of a program that fits within the mandate of this initiative. I outline my interpretation of the way in which the Project Approach Workshop introduced this pedagogical approach to the research participants, using my field notes to summarize the in-service activity. I present immediate workshop feedback from the participants, as well as longitudinal feedback from the teachers in the study, to reveal their evaluations of its relevance as a professional learning experience. I also present both my interpretations and those of the presenter. In conclusion, I introduce the self profiles of the teachers who decided to experiment with the approach as participants in the research study. Following these self introductions, the teachers identify their initial teaching plans, based on this in-service experience. This information sets the stage for the teachers' ongoing conversations and journalling, and places the study in the real world milieu of contemporary elementary education in Alberta.

A Story of Program Continuity: Then and Now

The Program Continuity Policy addresses educational reform in Alberta. This policy, as published by Alberta Education (1990b), advocates approaches to learning and teaching based on concepts of *continuity* and *integration*. It states: "This direction confirms that learning is a continuous experience and that children learn in different ways at different times, even though they happen to be the same age" (p. 4), thereby addressing the principles of "developmentally appropriate practice" (Bredekamp, 1988). Program Continuity is consistent with the constructivist philosophy of early childhood educators and with the thinking of general educators, who are currently debating topics of "School Reform", "Restructuring", and "Total Quality Management." In the previously presented literature review, I provided a discussion of **Change and Professional Learning**, addressing concerns from writers in Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Netherlands. These international perspectives provide a higher profile to the direction taken by provincial program developers.

The Program Continuity Policy reflects the thinking of constructivist theorists, who say that "the aim of education should be not only to instruct, but to provide a formative milieu for the child's indissociable intellectual, moral, and affective development - not just to furnish the mind, but to help form its reasoning power" (de Vries, 1987, p. 41). They see affectivity as "bound up with intellectual development, where the differentiation of interests, feelings, and values, and the exercise of will are an integral part of developing thought about physical and social worlds" (p. 41). Therefore, the educational approaches recommended in the policy are based on principles of child development, recognizing the individual differences and special needs of children. It places emphasis on "active learning," meaningful learning materials and experiences, integrated instruction, and shared decision making through involvement with parents in the education of their children. The policy's focus on thinking skills is reflected in the supporting document, Teaching Thinking/Enhancing Learning (Alberta Education, 1990c) which provides practical suggestions for classroom teachers. The Program Continuity policy also encourages the use of evaluative procedures which focus on qualitative dimensions of evaluation (performance assessment), in order to foster students' learning by recognizing and building on existing strengths and developing strategies to overcome their weaknesses. A basic assumption stated in policy documents is that "teachers respect children as learners."

There seems to be a move in educational literature in which contemporary scholars are revisiting the works of John Dewey (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Greenberg, 1992; Hendrick, 1992; Prawat, 1992; Westbrook, 1992; Greene, 1993). In my view, Program Continuity is also a call to return to the constructivist educational theory of Dewey (1938). Although Dewey introduced many of his ideas at the beginning of this century, they are as relevant today as they were then, and also provide a philosophical base for the provincial policy. The emphasis on collaborative and democratic learning, flexible scheduling, work experiences, and community activity, as well as the focus on the primacy of "active learning through experience," are principles of progressive education, both today and during Dewey's time. In an insightful comment on the philosophy of Dewey, Westbrook (1992) says his educational theory was far less child-centered and more teacher-centered than is often supposed. "His confidence that children would develop a democratic character in the schools he envisioned was rooted less in a faith in the spontaneous and crude capacities of the child than in the ability of teachers to create an environment in the classroom in which they possessed the means to mediate these capacities over into habits of social intelligence and responsiveness" (p. 414). This perspective provides support for the ongoing professional learning of teachers as they develop experiential learning environments for their students. But Dewey, himself, cautions that "the road of the new education is not an easier one to follow than the old road but a more strenuous and difficult one" (1938, p. 90). Such is likely the case for those who follow the principles of Program Continuity.

In spite of the solid philosophical underpinnings of the Program Continuity Policy, it met with opposition from many administrators, teachers, parents, and Department of Education personnel. People have conflicting views as to what it actually is, whether or not it can be implemented, and if so, how? It has been a source of confusion and controversy, and has had a problematic history since its inception in 1984. Originally, it was introduced as an "Articulation Statement," primarily to provide continuity between ECS (kindergarten) and grade one programs. However, many perceived it as an attempt to impose the early childhood philosophy into elementary school programs; thus, it met with resistance from traditional educators and parents, who were then firmly entrenched in the "back to the basics" movement. The underlying perception that the government was moving in the direction of "exploratory learning and hands-on experience" as pedagogical methods for use in elementary grades was disturbing for many people.

The statement was rewritten under the title, Education Program Continuity: A Policy Statement of the Articulation of Children's Learning Experiences, in 1988, placing the misunderstood word, "articulation," within a more relevant context. However, the term, "Program Continuity," proved to be equally ambiguous. The new thrust of this statement centered around the developmental learning principles that extended the ages of the target group into the upper elementary grades - "early childhood services **through** grade six." In 1990, the policy was approved and included in the Program of Studies: Elementary Handbook, and thus officially recognized by the Department of Education. An updated package, in the form of five separate booklets, was distributed to schools in January, 1991, in an effort to clarify the meaning of "continuity" in the context of the regular school environment. Following publication of the policy document, educators were heavily involved in presenting in-service presentations to address the meaning of the concepts, both explicit and implicit, in the policy. I was a member of an interdisciplinary committee to advance positive ways in which the policy could be introduced. I also presented many workshops to a variety of people (Board of Education members, administrators, teachers, and parents) in an attempt to bring a clearer message to the educational and public communities. Such was the status of the policy implementation program at the time I began my research study.

My colleagues and I had limited success in advancing understanding through such endeavors. Perhaps one of the reasons why our methods were largely ineffective lies in Glickman's (1992) observation that "the current problem with the national rhetoric about restructuring is that schools can be induced to try to make these changes without a thorough understanding of why such changes are necessary and why they are worth the inevitable confusions and conflicts that will ensue" (p. 27). As well, one-shot presentations, and even week-long seminars, do not provide ongoing opportunities for "resocialization," as discussed by Fullan (1982):

> Implementation, whether it is voluntary or imposed, is none other than a process of *resocialization*. The foundation of resocialization is *interaction*, learning by doing, concrete role models, meetings with resource consultants and fellow implementers, practice of behavior, the fits and starts of cumulative, ambivalent, gradual self-confidence all constitute a process of coming to see the meaning of change more clearly. They are effective when they combine concrete teacher-specific training activities, ongoing continuous assistance and support during the process of implementation, and regular meeting with peers and others. People can and do change, but it requires social energy. (p. 67)

Prior to the fall of 1991, it seemed that the Program Continuity initiative lacked both the required social interaction and energy necessary for it to gain credibility and to become a force for change across the province, or even to stimulate change in individual jurisdictions. However, the government initiative, now in policy format, did force curriculum developers and administrational leaders to take Program Continuity more seriously during the 1991-92 school year. Educational leaders put their efforts toward finding concrete examples of innovative approaches that would demonstrate how its underlying philosophy and strong set of values could be actualized in local classrooms. Although former reluctance to take personal initiative may have been due to a fear that such exemplar models would be viewed as prescriptions for practice (the "Betty Crocker method" of initiating curriculum change as discussed by Eisner, 1985b), program developers began to see that local support for practical teaching models does not necessarily restrict the ingenuity of individual schools to develop original approaches to the implementation of Program Continuity; instead, many educators realized that they can be beneficial, if they are based on a way of thinking about teaching, learning, and professionalism. Lieberman (1990) also sees the presentation of program models as effective, if they are not based on "gimmicks;" however, she also emphasizes that programs will only be successful if teachers seriously and reflectively consider the issues from multiple perspectives. She says: "This way of thinking sees content, context, and culture as integral to teachers' involvement in new ways of using curriculum and pedagogy and to their participation in making the organizational decisions that most affect their students and themselves" (p. 2).

Last year, school systems began to meet individually and collectively to discuss their progress toward meeting the projected implementation date of September, 1993. I sensed a growing interest and excitement in the field and many educators, although still not totally committed to the philosophy, were actively debating the issues. Many school jurisdictions developed local Program Continuity Policy and had specific plans outlining how they would reach the September, 1993 implementation deadline. All three of the systems for which my research participants worked had policy development well underway, and all the teachers were involved in some way with this process in their individual communities. Program Continuity was often a topic of conversation in the research group sessions, and I shared materials with the teachers to support their efforts locally. I believed we were on the forefront of educational change in Alberta; however, I was disappointed.

In the Spring of 1993, an unexpected directive was distributed from the office of the Minister of Education stating that Program Continuity would not be mandated in the Fall of 1993. In his letter of November 25, 1992, the politician wrote:

> Because, as a province, we are not ready, I am postponing the date for implementing the program continuity policy. Twelve months from now, I will assess the degree to which jurisdictions have data on individual student progress, and the degree to which schools are organized to deliver programs that are based on what a student needs to learn next in the curriculum. (Dinning, 1993, p. 3)

I consider this ministerial action to be the result of political pressure from dissident groups; however, the decision was interpreted in different ways throughout the educational community. Some suggested, "Program Continuity is just on hold and will go ahead after more work is done in the field," while the opposing forces flatly stated, "We can forget all that now! It's dead in the water!" Only history will tell which of these positions proves to be more accurate: however, I believe one thing to be definitely true. The educational debate and resulting school improvement, however limited it may be, is positive! I believe the Program Continuity Policy will not (and perhaps should not) be implemented in the future, as I think the term itself has produced much confusion; however, I also believe that the force for positive change has begun and will continue to be a dynamic force in Alberta's educational system, regardless of the formal name under which it may eventually be known in official policy. I choose to be an optimist and will continue to work toward this end.

A Story of the Project Approach Workshop

A Grounded Philosophical Understanding

Early childhood educator and author, Dr. Sylvia Chard, came to teach at the University of Alberta during this climate of confusion and change in elementary education. She promotes the Project Approach, a pedagogical program which is consistent with Program Continuity, and one that she and Dr. Lilian Katz outline in their book, Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach (1989). In Alberta she actively promotes this approach as one that supports the principles of the government policy. Dr. Chard teaches the methods in one of her university courses, has developed an experiential workshop to introduce the approach to practitioners, and has written a book, The Project Approach: A Practical Guide for Teachers (1992), to accompany the workshop. At the time of my research, some influential Alberta Education employees were endorsing the Project Approach as an effective method of implementing the Program Continuity Policy.

The Project Approach is in the same tradition of pedagogical thought as the progressive education of Dewey, the British Infant School, and the open education of the 60s and 70s. Thus, it is part of an cyclical tradition that is not always accepted by all members of society. However, Mary Lane recognizes the approach as "buttressed by sound and thorough research in many interrelated areas: normative and dynamic dimensions of development, learning theory, motivation and communication" in an approach that is both "innovative and resourceful" (Katz and Chard, 1989, p. ix). She says the emphasis placed on the development of social competence of young children, by suggesting that they learn by interacting with their own first-hand experiences and with their real world environment, is not a new idea.

However, the promotion of integrated, meaningful, experiential activities that engage their minds fully in the quest for knowledge, understanding, and skill does provide teachers with a new integrative framework for curriculum planning. Furthermore, Katz and Chard assure teachers that they value both systematic instruction and spontaneous, child-initiated activities, alongside projects. As well, they suggest ways in which learning experiences can be structured to support systematic instruction, free play, and project work.

Dr. Chard offers presentations and conducts Project Approach Workshops and Seminars, both locally and internationally. In July, 1991, she presented a three-day workshop, which I attended, along with twenty elementary school teachers. These teachers individually responded to a workshop notice that had been distributed across Central Alberta, and were sent a copy of the book, Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach, as part of their registration fee. The Project Approach Workshop is different from traditional ones, in that it occurs over a three-day span of time and involves the participants directly in a project at an adult level. As well, the presenter introduces the theoretical base of the Project Approach to the participants and also encourages them to reflect on their own practices during the last afternoon of the workshop. I was involved in the workshop as a researcher, doing "participant observation" (Spradley, 1980). I kept field notes, using condensed accounts (recording some verbatim conversation), expanded accounts, as well as personal analysis and interpretation. I acted as a "moderate observer," sitting with the group, interacting at times, but not becoming actively involved in the small group discussion and specific tasks.

Although it is not a commonly used practice, this experiential approach to adult learning is advocated in the literature (Grossman, 1992b; Firestone, 1993). Because teachers do not have the knowledge or skills required to use experiential teaching methods with their students, we should encourage their participation in programs where appropriate teaching models are used to actively involve them as adult learners in the construction of personal knowledge. McPherson & Shapiro (1993) say, "minds need to be challenged, thinking processes need to be sharpened, conceptual skills need to be expanded, feelings need to be appreciated, commitment and affection need to be honored" (p. 7), through adult learning experiences in which topics of personal interest are actively explored by the participants.

Perkins (1991) adopts a similar position as he says "understanding is more a matter of what people can do than something they have. Understanding involves action more than possession" (p. 6). This sense-making is what Eisner (1985a) refers to as an "artistic act." He states: "Knowing, like teaching, requires the organism to be active and to construct meaningful patterns out of experience. At base, such patterns are artistic constructions, a means through which the human creates a conception of reality" (p. 364). Proponents of this adult learning approach believe, as does Eisner, that teachers are the "architects of their own enlightenment, building conceptual edifices that are beautiful, as well as serviceable." This concept of "doing" and developing "artistic constructions," at an adult level, is the type of "understanding" that Chard believes is a distinctive feature of the teacher training workshop she had developed. This is the rationale upon which the workshop is based, and serves as its primary connection to Program Continuity as an approach to teaching and learning in Alberta's elementary schools.

At the Workshop

Although the Project Approach is not the focus of the research inquiry, it is central to the study as it served as a catalyst for the change process. The workshop provided a genesis of ideas for the teachers as they began experimenting with the use of projects. Therefore, I will present an overview of the workshop to assist the reader in better understanding the descriptions provided by the research participants as they share their experiences with project work.

The workshop was held in a large government building seminar room. The school year was over and teachers had been on holiday for about a week before the workshop began. The workshop was scheduled from 9:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Dr. Chard began with a self-introduction and then provided an opportunity for each participant to introduce himself or herself. There were eighteen women and two men in attendance, most of whom taught in the primary grades. Sylvia then went back around the group, stating each person's name and in what grade they taught, remembering all but two names. The atmosphere throughout the workshop was relaxed, and the participants and the presenter addressed one another on a first name basis.

Sylvia provided an overview of the three days of activity, and then briefly discussed "What is the Project Approach?" She lectured to the group for about one and a half hours, providing a theoretical base for the approach by explaining the views of research theorists that support her work. She told humorous anecdotes, using real life illustrations from her own teaching experiences in England, to firmly plant the approach in a practical perspective. She used overheads and handouts as support materials.

Although the room was very cold, it heated up when Sylvia introduced her views on appropriate topic selections. Her view that topics, not themes, should be selected from the real world of the children's experience was not one that appeared to be well understood. Some individuals expressed confusion over how such topics could be selected from the curriculum. Several teachers entered into a heated debate with her, insisting that topics like "dinosaurs" make excellent study projects. Sylvia did not compromise her position, but she did allow time for those teachers to openly express their feelings. Her acknowledgment that English educators are not as good at systematic instruction as are North American teachers seemed to win her favor with the group.

After a short refreshment break, she showed photographic slides of project work in which she was involved in England. Although the slides were excellent, I sensed that some of the teachers did not relate well to them; perhaps they felt it was not "the real world" of education for them. As well, it became noisy in the room and there was some trouble hearing over the competing noise of the event in the room next door. Lunch was delivered and Sylvia used this time to build rapport with small groups of teachers. She asked questions like, "Am I talking about real children to you?" The teachers all responded positively to her as she talked with them individually.

After lunch she distributed a hand-out to provide an overview of "phases in the life of a project," and engaged the group in brainstorming and developing "concept webs," using the topic "Neighborhood." The teachers became intensely involved with this hands-on approach and many ideas were generated. They were then encouraged to form groups based on mutual interests. Some were immediately compliant, while others became distracted and confused with the problem, "How would I do this with children in my classroom?" When the groups finally formed, they were encouraged to develop questions - legitimate questions reflecting their "need to know," personally and as adults. As with children, some took the task more seriously than did others, and some rather superficially joined a group, with comments like: "Do you need another person in your group?" At this time I wondered if the teachers would get involved in a process of personal discovery when they had not genuinely considered what they wanted to know.

For the last forty-five minutes of the day the teachers worked independently, drawing and writing from memory about the particular topic that his or her group was exploring. Most teachers worked quietly but diligently, and many seemed tired by this point in the day. Sylvia dismissed them at 4:00 p.m., with some more handouts and a request to set up a relevant field trip for tomorrow to answer their initial questions. She invited them to continue working on their memories (Phase 1) at home, if they wished, as these would be shared the next day.

The workshop began promptly at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday. For the first half hour, individual teachers shared their drawings and writing from the day before, all very interested in the work of their peers. I was impressed by the creativity in the participants' poetry, story writing, and art work. Sylvia lectured for about an hour on the value of field trips and presented possibilities of learning activities that would eventually become part of a display presentation. She used more handouts, overheads, and slides from England to demonstrate typical display materials. At this point I felt energy building in the group - perhaps because this was now very practical work that they could envision doing with their students and maybe also because they were anticipating the Phase II field trips. They were dismissed at 10:30 a.m. and were to reconvene by 2:00 p.m. As the small groups returned, they worked on the new information they had gleaned during the field trip and began developing learning materials to share with their classmates.

Again, like children, these adult learners functioned in different ways during the group time. Following the field trips, there was high energy in the room. This energy was directed in diverse ways - some groups engaged in practical debates about project work as a teaching method; some were totally off-topic, appearing to be perfunctorily completing the expectations of the leader; others were actively engaged in their own learning, enthusiastically providing materials that demonstrated answers to their original questions. One group was so intensely involved that they entered into conflict over ways that the materials were being produced.

After an hour of group work, Sylvia reunited the group for a thirty minute lecture on features of display and its importance, emphasizing its role of communication and accountability. There were many questions at this time, as the teachers were concerned about the student evaluation using this approach. As Sylvia directed them back to group, two teachers expressed to her that they felt their time could be better spent in thinking and talking about structure and management of these learning activities, instead of spending their time doing them. Realizing they had missed the point of the active involvement in their own learning, she repeated that she felt that adults could better understand children's learning if they became actively engaged in answering their own questions about the real world. However, Sylvia promised a one hour lecture addressing structure during the last day. That night, she spent time preparing additional information about classroom structure.

On Friday morning, some groups arrived before 8:30 a.m. to complete their displays for Phase III of the project. One teacher remarked, "Isn't this wonderful! When children get really interested, they come into the classroom and get right down to work too." The "official" day began with each group sharing their field trip experiences to such places as city parks, a greenhouse, a dairy, and a recycling factory. The teachers enthusiastically talked about the people that they had interviewed. Prior to the field trip, Sylvia had assured them that those interviewed would be willing to talk about their work, but the teachers seemed somewhat surprised to have her prediction corroborated.

Sylvia then reviewed and elaborated concepts from the initial overview of "What is a project?", and lectured for an hour on the place of art in project work, using slides of children's drawings and of the famous Italian program that stresses an arts-based curriculum. The teachers spent the remainder of the morning completing their displays. There were more and more questions as Sylvia circulated around the room. There was an interesting difference, at this point, in participant motivation. Sylvia's unstated goal was to model for the workshop participants the teacher's role during Phase II of a project; thus, she tried to keep them focused by discussing their activities with them and asking questions about their projects that might challenge their thinking. Many of the participants were more interested in receiving her answers to solutions for their anticipated problems in doing classroom project work, than they seemed to be in presenting a display for their peers. I sensed Sylvia's annoyance when the teachers tried to lead the discussion in this direction, as it was in direct opposition to the basic premises of the workshop. I wondered if it may have been helpful for her to directly inform the workshop participants of the "role" she was playing.

At this time, I responded to a concern from a group of teachers who felt that project work was not consistent with the Alberta Program of Studies. I located this document and brought it back to the room. Upon pursuing it, Sylvia and I could better understand the teachers' concerns, although we both felt it was not an insurmountable problem. During group time, Sylvia also demonstrated how to make a string rope, much to the delight of many of the teachers. In spite of some opposition to the required task, the displays were excellent. After lunch, each teacher was instructed to "Look at, read, and do everything at each display." Rather than recording all the ideas, some teachers brought cameras and took pictures. The interactive display items were most popular. One group asked their colleagues to answer a questionnaire about parks; one group made a game for others to play on "sorting garbage;" another group organized a milk-tasting contest, recording results on a graph. It was interesting to overhear several adults make comments very much like the ones that I would expect to hear from children: "I like ours best!"

The last one and a half hours were primarily spent in pragmatic lecture and discussion about "structure." Sylvia presented a detailed outline of "how I did it in my classroom," but assured the teachers that she was not offering a recipe of how it should be done. There were many personal questions and concerns about "how to do it," all of which Sylvia responded to with positive suggestions. She encouraged them to begin small - perhaps even to begin by changing space and moving furniture to facilitate different types of groupings or by doing a project for a half day each week. The in-service activity ended with each participant writing down two or three personal learnings from the workshop and sharing these with a colleague. In conclusion, Sylvia and I invited interested teachers to participate in my research study and handed out information to them.

In a debriefing session following the workshop, Sylvia expressed dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of this particular workshop. Although she was pleased that some teachers personally thanked her for an exhilarating experience, she felt the participants generally had not become actively engaged with new ideas. Although I understood her concern and recognized her frustration, it had been a positive experience for me as I am committed to this experiential approach to learning. However, I did not participate actively, as I spent the three days in note taking and reflection; therefore, maybe my interpretation was less valid than was hers as workshop presenter.

In retrospect, I believe there may be a variety of contributing factors to Sylvia's negative feelings. The room was cold and noisy the first day. Many teachers were feeling "burn-out" after a busy school year; some may have felt frustration with the complexity of the approach; still others were uncertain how the approach could be integrated with existing Alberta Education curriculum goals; and, for most participants, this was a new experience with an unfamiliar workshop format. As well, there is always a possibility with any workshop that there may have been personality clashes between the presenter and some participants, especially if there is the perception that she is someone from "over there" coming "over here" to tell us "how to do it right." In the intervening time, Sylvia reports that she has refined the workshop, developing an approach which better meets the needs of teachers in whatever location she presents the in-service activity. She has written another support book and is producing an in-service package which includes video tapes of local teachers who use the Project Approach.

Participant Interpretations of the Experience After the Workshop

The workshop participants each completed a personal evaluation of the workshop experience. The following comments are representative of the feedback, and made me realize how self critical academics often are of their accomplishments. Although Dr. Chard and I were perhaps overly critical, the teachers expressed appreciation of the experience and the suggestions provided were constructive.

The first day of the course I had enough new ideas and I felt defensive, even angry at times. My mind wanted to deny and reject any new thoughts. By the second day, I had worked out some of those "pinch points" and was receptive to new ideas - even excited. I can now see how the workshop ideas, which even seemed somewhat irrelevant and unworkable yesterday, could be implemented today.

As I recall how little information I have retained from workshops that I have attended in the past, I realize that this is one experience that I won't forget because I experienced it! I feel that I am already on the way toward using this approach. I will take some of my themes and extend them further using the Project Approach.

The hands-on approach was very good. More time seemed to be needed for discussion. I liked your suggestions for implementing the approach in various stages.

Thank you for a very positive experience. It was thought provoking and an exciting way to try many activities.

I enjoyed the workshop! I plan to incorporate more ongoing projects into my school year and feel it will be especially helpful with the two little boys I will be getting who are "behavior disordered."

I found the information and activities very practical. It clearly showed the process skills needed for children (and adults) to learn. By the end of the third day, things came together with clarity and showed how unique we all really are. One concern I have is how to take what I have learned back to the school to show others what we have done and how to apply it.

What an enervating course to take in the summer! I feel inspired to start back to school next week. Well, anyway, I'll start planning for school next week! You've made me think about ways that I can change my classroom and my focus. Although I already use a great deal of project-type work, I learned a lot about how I can extend my ideas.

I was more interested in the actual implementation - how to organize topics, apply to upper elementary grades, choose projects, and to evaluate these, as our jurisdiction requires grading. Some of the ideas, such as teaching in small groups, I found very appealing, as well as giving students choices.

I'm glad I came to this workshop. I knew that I needed a different approach to teaching, because I come from a very traditional school and community. However, I do want to do the best that I can for my students and I feel that I've come away with good ideas. I plan on starting small.

Sometimes workshops prove to be life-changing experiences for me, because they offer thought provoking, risk taking challenges that shake me out of my experientially-secure rut! This is one of those experiences for me! I plan to take the one million new ideas you've exposed me to and to TRY to implement at least three - one for each day that we've been together. I know it will be exciting for me, and life-giving to the students. Your influence will become my influence on them. Thanks for taking your time to share so much and to help us to become "child-centered" in our careers. I'm impressed, and even more special - I'm changed!

There are many aspects that I have found helpful - mostly the challenge of trying something new. I'm glad the workshop was three days - five would have been better for more in-depth study. Hope we can have a follow up after a period of trying out time - say in January? Thanks so much.

Evaluative Comments from the Research Participants

I have separated the comments from the teachers who volunteered for my research, collected at three different times during the study. Ironically, their evaluative responses were among the most negative of the workshop participants, although these teachers are the ones who volunteered for the research study. I wondered if their perceptions of the professional learning experience would change over time, but found that the tone of their evaluative comments was much the same.

Ashley's comments immediately following the workshop:

I found the past three days very useful. It got me thinking about new ways to teach and extensions of what I already do. It has got me very excited to try these things. I will try the project approach, but I will have to ease in slowly so that the children and I can get used to this. I really liked the way that you explained the underlying structure, so we can defend ourselves, if necessary. I found "learning by doing" very effective. It helps to make it more real and I can see how the children may react or feel.

Ashley's comments during the first discussion group session in September:

I like the idea of field trips, but I don't think it's feasible in our small community because there really isn't a lot to see. The money is tight and I don't know the community that well. I've only been teaching here a year. Our library is very limited, too. But the workshop did get me thinking about my minor individual differences. I did this a bit last year, but not very much. It got me excited about integrating subjects and got me ready for this year and thinking about all the things that could be better for the kids. It was a good focus to get me going and I said, "OK, you had last year to muddle through it. Now you can start doing things. You are going to do centers. Yes, you are going to integrate." But I do want to start off slowly.

Ashley's comments during the last discussion groups session in April:

I think the workshop gave me exposure to new ideas - something that was a little ahead of where I was then and something to investigate further. But I don't think it gave me enough to put it into practice. I needed the discussion groups as follow up to make it work in my classroom.

Brad's comments immediately following the workshop:

I came to the workshop hoping to get something to help me with grade one! I feel that I have gained much, although not exactly what I had expected or hoped for - I love to be spoon-fed! I love to talk things through - sometimes it can be less than efficient, but I would have appreciated more jam sessions. Thanks.

Brad's comments during the first discussion group session in September:

There was not really any adult curiosity about our choice of a project topic. We thought we were going to have fun in the park and we all had good memories of parks, so that was it. As well, we didn't have enough time to develop our ideas at the workshop. I think the highlight of the workshop for me was motivational. My focus all through university had been understanding that kids are individuals and if they are going to learn, they are going to learn best at their own rate and within their own style. I think that same idea came through in the workshop. I loved the field trip idea! I already went to the store to look at different types of apples - kids even got to take a few back to school! But I felt that the Project Approach was supposed to be really flexible and open ended, but the workshop, for me, turned out to be closed ended. I think she should have presented more open ended ways of doing the activities. But I really like the idea of individualized learning and the idea that not all kids need systematic instruction on the same objective at the same time.

Brad's comments during the last discussion groups session in April:

I think that I would never have got going on the project if the summer workshop hadn't been followed up this fall. It's taken me all these months, as it is, and I'm still not where I wanted to be - but at least I'm on my way! I think that if I was given an hour presentation on the project approach and then four or five months follow up, I think it would be better than spending three days in a workshop in the first place.

Brad's comments, one year later:

Looking back, the workshop was not exciting. I don't think that I would have changed much, if anything, just because of going to the workshop, if it had not been for: 1) I wanted to learn something; 2) I was teamed with another teacher who also wanted to learn something; 3) My administrators, from vice principal to superintendent, supported us; 4) Other teachers were watching curiously; 5) I was scrambling for ideas to use in teaching grade one; 6) I had the support of a facilitator and the other research participants; and 7) I wrote a journal entry (almost daily), reflected upon it bi-weekly, and received regular feedback.

Marie's comments immediately following the workshop:

I would have appreciated more information prior to the workshop about what it would involve. Thank you for many good ideas which I am anxious to try. The last day was much too rushed - I have many unanswered questions about curriculum. I wanted to go home with definite ideas for beginning in the fall, but I'm not ready to make those decisions.

Marie's comments during the first discussion group session in September:

I've sort of come full circle and I found the Project Approach brought a lot of things together for me. Speaking of centers - I used to do them many years ago and used them as a vehicle to carry my students through while I conferenced with a group. I also tried independent studies, where we brainstormed things that we could do, much like the Project Approach. I liked the list of guidelines we got at the workshop for things you could include in a display, as these were the kinds of things we did when I did independent assignments with the kids. And so it was interesting for me because some of the things I have done. I was really interested when she said we could include cooperative learning, problem solving, whole language and other things. I said, "Hey something to bring everything together!" However, I admit that I was asleep half the time during the workshop. We had company and stayed up until 2:00 a.m. every night and then I had to leave at 6:00 a.m. every morning to drive there. I was just like a zombie. I don't know if anyone else needs this, but I probably slept through most of it, so I need you to review the phases for us. And the worst thing I did was to lose my handout, so I don't know how to get started.

Marie's comments in January before she left the research study:

I think you probably have to go to a workshop to get new ideas. The ideas from the Project Approach workshop this summer probably stuck better, because of experiencing them. If you do things, then you remember them. The discussion mini-group sessions were helpful to support that; otherwise, if we had just gone to the workshop, chances are we would forget what it was all about. I think Sylvia spent too much time on theory at the workshop - it could have been done in one hour. The slides were fairly good, but too long. A dozen slides would give you a feel for it. There was no need for a lot of time to be spent on that, when time could have been spent on discussing real practice. I also think too much time was spent on going out and actually collecting information ourselves. I think walking us through the process would have been enough. I don't think my time at the workshop was justified. I really question driving an hour and half, there and back, each morning and evening for three days, to cut things out so we could end up with a final product. I know the "doing" was good, but I could have benefited just as much from talking about it and planning for the actual project.

Rachael's comments during the first discussion group in September:

I didn't attend this particular workshop, but I might go to one later this year; however, I did do the same kinds of experiential adult learning activities at university when I took a course from Dr. Chard. The adult students that I worked with didn't let the problems and issues grow naturally out of our memories, so it was quite superficial. Our group did the "university car park," but I didn't really care about it. The general topic was imposed upon the whole group and there wasn't a feeling of energy that comes from finding out new things for yourself. We just did individual projects in small groups. The other group I was in chose to do "schools," primarily because they were all going to be teaching social studies in primary schools and we all had lots of books and materials and could dig them out easily. Our questions weren't real questions.

Rachael's comments one and a half years later:

I never did get to a workshop, but I do think that I got the same experience during my university course, so I feel no need to attend one. The Project Approach is a very regimented sequence of events - not what I try to do now! The big thing, for me, is being authentic. This is not easy to do! The kid's questions are not my questions, but I need to examine both.

Profiles of the Research Participants

In the previous section, you heard the voices of the research participants as they discussed the Project Approach workshop. It is now important to become better acquainted with these teachers. During the first group session in September, each person introduced him or herself to their research colleagues. It is interesting that these introductory comments revealed much about the personality of the person, as well as his or her basic beliefs. This initial self-introduction is the first section of the three-part self profile of each teacher. The second part represents little bits and pieces of biography that I gleaned from both their journals and our conversations, as well as additional information gained both directly and indirectly. The third section is composed of autobiographical anecdotes obtained during a final interview with each teacher. I also included the limited information that I obtained from Marie, as it is necessary to know something about her to understand why she chose not to complete the study. In this section, the teachers' voices are in regular print, and my responses are in italics.

Ashley

I live in an apartment in Elkhead. I have twenty one kids in grade three this year, which is up one from last year. Last year, all the kids knew each other from the beginning, but this year I have three students who are new to our school. Sometimes it's hard to integrate them into the group. One of the moms is concerned that her little girl is not fitting in and she has already called me about it. Another mom also told me that her daughter feels like she has no one to play with, so I solved two problems with one. I said, "Why don't you play with Kelsey - she's new. Maybe you should show her around here." I got the okay! When I was outside on supervision today, I watched them playing together. It looks like this has helped both of them.

Already I can tell the difference from when I was a first year teacher last year. I walked in this year and I wasn't terrified the first week! It's really neat, but I'm finding that it's only now the kids are starting to feel like "my kids." I kept wanting to go to the grade four room and start teaching, because that's where my kids from last year are now. We had a really good year last year. This year the kids look really good too and we have started some new things. It's kind of neat, because they have some idea of who I am from other student's stories about what I'm like. They've also seen some of the things I do through assemblies and class presentations, so the kids get the idea that I will do what they do and that I am one of the "weird and twisted" and that we have a lot of fun!

We have a new vice principal at our school. He's "moving and shaking" - getting the staff a little shaken up with some interesting ideas that have never been tried. The kids are really responsive to him and all the teachers think he's neat. Our principal thinks it's really great that Marie and I are doing this research project. I'm pleased that he wants us to be on a Program Continuity Committee for our school division.

Ashley's narrative reveals that she cares about the feelings of children, that she values creativity in teachers, and that she is enthused and excited about her work. She works closely with a seasoned teacher, Marie, and speaks highly of their collegial *relationship. During the week she spends most evenings preparing for her students. During the initial data collection period, she was dating a man who lives in the city, about an hour from Elkhead, and spent most of her social time with him. She enjoys skiing in the winter.*

As a child, I lived on an acreage near the city and took most of my schooling in a nearby town. My parents are young and very successful in their careers. Dad works in sales and mom is a secretary for an accountant. My parents were firm, but fair. They had high expectations for their kids, and we always met them. I think that I wanted to be a teacher because of strong positive memories of my teachers. My grade seven teacher, Mr. Smith, was super. He really cared about us all and we did interesting things in his class. At that time, I didn't have a lot of friends; I was one of those really smart kids who isn't accepted very well by the other kids. Over the year, he convinced me that it was acceptable, and even admirable, to be smart. He saw something in me that no one else saw - he made a difference in my life. In fact, my mom invited him to my university convocation party - and he came!

I'm single, and I have some really good friends, but no one man in particular. I started a graduate program at the university last September and I'm finding my life is really busy. I just started an exercise program. I hope it improves my self-image.

Brad

Well, there's not a lot to say. I'm married and have three kids. I really enjoy them. I had the third one when I was going to university so that was kind of difficult to be on a student's income and end up having a third child in a two bedroom town house when you already have two kids packed into one bedroom!

I'm teaching grade one this year and I'm really enjoying it. I should have done it two years ago instead of teaching grade six. We started centers on Friday, and that was really interesting! I have never tried centers before and sometimes I feel that I don't achieve the same kind of things that I could with all the kids sitting in their desks.

But maybe I'll learn to take my focus off a specific objective for the whole class and try to get down to a few more specific things for individuals.

There are seventeen kids in the class, none with special needs. I have an excellent counterpart, another grade one teacher, Peggy, who is really trying hard to make some changes in her classroom. She has lots of materials so that makes it easier for me to start off in a new grade. Newton is a super school - really well grounded. Our vice principal has been there for twenty seven years and really has things running smoothly. It's interesting how he reacts to change. When I found out that grade one was available this year, I asked him if I could have it. That's a change for him, because he has never had a male in grade one; in fact, there has never been a male teaching below grade five in this school. It took him a couple of days to think about a guy in grade one and what the parents might think in the community. He told me that one day he was lying in bed and said, "Oh, you old stodge! You know that a guy can probably teach grade one as well as any woman." He really is aware that he is an "old dog" and that learning new tricks isn't always easy, but he is a very fair person and very supportive. If you have a feeling that something should be done another way, he will certainly give you all the support he can to make it work.

I'm not sure if I want to do a masters in education or not. I like the idea of teaching, but I'm not really sure why. I almost feel that if I want to go back for more education I would like to take something in the "sciences," but I guess that would help me in teaching, too.

Later we found out that Brad had worked in the postal service before becoming a teacher. He spends many hours at the school in the evenings and on weekends. He coaches a girl's basketball team, and is also on the Alberta Teaching Association Local Executive. Brad has just recently completed building a new home in Newton. Before he began the interpretation of his stories, he added these reflections on his life story.

I've always wanted to be a teacher - since I was in grade one. My parents and teachers supported the idea until about the sixth grade, at which time they began to think I should be a doctor or a lawyer. For the next six years, that's all I heard! In high school, my teachers worked hard to convince me not to be a teacher. They thought that teaching was too stressful, political, and not appreciated enough by administrators, parents, students, and society!

It took a short stint in a pre-law program and ten years of climbing the corporate ladder to make me realize that I was who I was - a teacher! It has taken me four years - a season of attitudinal exhaustion and three years of exhilaration - to realize that teaching really can be too stressful, too political, and unappreciated by many of the stakeholders. But only if you let it or cause it to be so! A teacher can make the "job" rewarding. My last three years in this school system have proven that to be true!

I've been thinking about "change" lately. Will I change as time and methods change? Will I stay with the old "tried and true?" Changes seem to have relevance at the time, but will innovations like the Project Approach always be the best? Have we found the answer? Perhaps the only answer is that change is both inevitable and necessary?

These are some thoughts from the Bible that I can personally relate to what I believe about children and teaching. From Matthew 18: 5 and 10: "And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me" and "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that the angels in Heaven always see the face of my Father in Heaven."

Rachael

I'm Rachael and I am now teaching Grade Two for Greensville Separate School Division. I have seventeen kids right now and they're thinking of adding more students to the class! However, I have three mentally handicapped kids come in for part of my day, which does add a little bit of spice! I also have four children who can't speak English. So seventeen is a bit deceiving! It's not quite as picture perfect as I would like it to be. I think I use chocolate as a coping device, in fact, I guess you could say I'm a major chocoholic. Today I had four chocolate bars and, in my first year of teaching, I spent two hundred dollars on chocolate covered donuts. Maybe I stay skinny because I'm training to run the marathon. I'm running off all my frustration - and all the chocolate!

I'm working on my masters at the university. Last year I had a sabbatical and it was a very, very good year. It's hard to come back! Why am I taking a masters? I guess that it's about time to see whether or not my brain still works, I guess. I've taught for twelve years - grades one, two, and three. I think that things are changing and I want to keep up-to-date with the current times. As I take more education, I find that there is such a separation between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. This is one of the reasons why my school board said I had to come back this year - to see whether or not the things that I had been espousing and writing can really work in the classroom. I'm finding it quite different to be back, because I'm feeling the need to do things differently - like having the alphabet down at the kid's level. I was looking for a place to put mine, down at my waist level and the other teachers really did think I was nuts the first week. But I wanted to see if it would really work - if they would use it more. Some kids have been going up and using it to find letters that they need or categorizing words in alphabetical order.

I guess that's not a major thing, but I wrote a paper in university on classroom environment and I want to try new things like that. That's why this year will be really challenging for me. I have all sorts of ideas of the ways that I think things should be, based on some theoretical models that I have learned. All the time that I was sitting in the university classroom, I was thinking, "I know how I can implement that idea" and "This is how it would work." But reality is having seventeen kids, and some integration of special needs kids, but not having them for a large block of time. It's having them go out here, and out there, and teaching grade two with a partner who doesn't think at all like I do, but we have to use the same books and the same materials and be at the same place at the same time when we hit report cards. So, its kind of fun - maybe?

As time went on, Rachael continued to share experiences of joy and frustration as she struggled with the theory-practice realities. Rachael uses imaginative language, replete with metaphors; these became her trademark in the group. What Rachael didn't tell us that first day is that she is in her mid-thirties, lives alone in an apartment, and has an active social life. She has a close relationship with her parents, who live only about a two hour drive away, and *with her brother, his wife and young nephew. She no sooner finished working on the ATA convention committee than she began work on the 1994 Early Childhood Education Council Provincial Conference. Rachael reveals more of herself in anecdotes about childhood learning experiences.*

On the first day of school, I usually didn't feel very good. I worried that maybe I wouldn't have any friends and that maybe the teacher wouldn't like me. My mother told me not to be nervous but I always felt like I was going to be sick! As an elementary student, I was very conscious of what my teachers wanted me to do. I remember quizzing my father about how the dam west of town was built and how it provided electricity for the town. He phoned the Trans Alta office and found out all about it. I went to school, armed with a report, and my teacher was so pleased that I had conducted the research on my own and taken the initiative to explore new ideas. Yet, I wasn't interested in electricity. I wanted the teacher to like me and to see me as a good student. Even when I was in grade one, I wanted to conform and do what the teacher demonstrated was of value.

When I think about where I feel I have done my "best" learning, I can see myself curled up on my bed and my mother sticking out her arm to demonstrate that a peninsula is an arm into the ocean; talking to my English teacher who is encouraging me to try a new style of writing; Mrs. Brown giving me a spoon for being "most flexible and light on her feet." I am crouching between two rows of books in the town library devouring an account of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, riding in the car with my father as he tells stories of coal mining and road building. I am in a university discussion group focusing on the merits of ungraded schools, in a classroom observing other teachers.

My "best" learning also comes as I walk around the neighborhood with children seeing the world through their eyes, discovering that they have questions for which I have no ready answers. All my learning takes place while I'm satisfying my need to find out more about my world, what intrigues me. It happens when I am given the freedom to explore, to question, and to ponder. Those around me acted as resources, guides, and sparks. They walked beside, not in front of me, and they helped me to find the answers to my many questions.

Marie

I'm Marie and I also teach at Elkhead Separate School, the same school in which Ashley teaches. I have got about half of the grade four class. I guess I'm just sitting here thinking, "How much do I have?" I do all the management and organization and actually teach four classes of grade four. I'm in special education the rest of the time. But I've always taught grade four and I feel like that's all I wanted to ever do, so that's where my focus tends to be. I was really quite upset when I got the assignment for special education, because I thought, "Oh no! I've got to learn all those curriculums and things!". But principals seem to think that you get into a rut if you stay in one grade, even though I'm not that type of person.

I'm always researching and so that probably is why I did get the special education position, although I do have a number of special education university classes that I've never used! I was asked to go to special education in our school and was there for two years before our system had an formal evaluation. It then was recommended that I take over the special education for the other school in our system as well. So, for three years I've travelled between two schools teaching special education in both places, with some classes in grade four, to bring it up to full time. We have had evaluations every year, and they're always asking questions like: "Where's our money going and do we have the right kids in the program?" At the last evaluation, I said that I was burned out from doing four different jobs. I suggested that I be placed in just one school. So I went back to our school and I'm slowly picking up more grade four classes. Before I did a lot of physical education, but now the new vice principal teaches most of those classes.

I've had a lot of teaching experience. I had a fairly good year last year, because I was liaison to a psychometrist and psychologists from the city. The focus was on special education teachers going into the classroom - more of a team effort and teaching small groups (including mentally handicapped kids) within regular classes so they weren't so obvious. I'm not sure of this approach, because it took a real quick twist in our system. We went from where I was responsible for all the special education programs prior to last year, to placing all the responsibility in the hands of the teachers. They were responsible for the "Instructional Educational Plan" and programming; I feel like I lost a handle. All of a sudden I had to depend on others and the work often didn't get done. It was really an uncomfortable feeling. I expressed that to my principal a number of times and he just said we had to try this new way. I am all for trying new ways. It's not that I'm not. But it was really awkward for me.

So this year, the principal isn't sure what we should be doing. I feel like I want to do more of what I have done before, because I feel more comfortable with it. We haven't resolved the issues yet. I'm still doing special education part time, and he hasn't given me much direction, not like when I was in the other school. That principal said "You're in charge and you know what needs to be done," and I appreciated that. This year I really don't know if our principal wants to be in charge, or if he wants me to be in charge, or who is to be accountable for what's going on. I just said to him that I really feel that if I were to interview parents the way that it was done last year, I would rather walk the opposite way, because nothing was laid out. I like to have things organized and structured. Last year, the teachers felt like they didn't have a choice as to whether or not I should come into their rooms, and I wasn't sure whether I was welcomed or not. When you have that hanging over you all the time, it's more stressful that teaching a regular class of students in one grade. I want to know where I'm going, and what I'm expected to do in a teacher's classroom. That means planning together, but we never have the time. Most people don't want to hang around after school.

If it doesn't improve this year, I want out of this job. I've spent every summer taking courses and I can't use what I've learned. Some of them have been non-credit courses, but I've picked up almost every program that it's possible to pick up, right down to Marie Clay's, from Australia. I've even ordered the materials for some new programs. So it really bugs me that the department of education makes changes every year and they don't even seem to know what they want - especially in the field of special education. The ideas are really wish-washy, no matter what school you go to.

We got an initial understanding of Marie's discontent with her teaching assignment and with her confusion about changing priorities in the school system. Later, before Marie left the research study, we found out she is a busy mother of adolescents, with a *professional husband whom she helps with his extra-curricular teaching responsibilities. She is involved in the church and the community and is also helping her husband in the building of a new house. During the fall, she moved into a temporary house, and was dealing with personal stress, in addition to her professional frustrations.*

Teachers' Initial Plans

These four teachers came to the first group session in September prepared to participate in the research study. They all had done some thinking about the Project Approach, and had some basic ideas that they hoped to put into practice in their classrooms. Some of the ideas became clearer as we talked during our first meeting, and by the end of the evening these were their stated plans.

Ashley: I decided to forego the field trip part and plan for centers. I wanted to do centers last year, but I didn't get them organized. This year I put a half day a week on my schedule and I posted it - so now I'm committed. You need to post a schedule for the kids so they know there's a time allotted for centers. Now they know when it is, if I ever don't do it, I'm toast with the kids! This first weekend was hard. I was busy with my sister's wedding and then I was sick on Monday and Tuesday and the centers were supposed to be on Wednesday afternoon. I thought, "I don't think I will be able to do it this week, but if I don't, then I'll have another excuse next week and the week after that and so on." So I made myself get ready for center time. They chose from junk art, painting, drama, and creative writing activities. I said to the kids, "We'll have to see how you do and how I feel about it and, if you're working, we can do more." But we're starting with only half a day a week until I see how I can include science, social and other subjects. Each week, I hope to add more activities. As I was writing up the activities, I was getting really excited about them.

Brad: I would really like to break out of instructing the whole group at the same time. But I'm wondering, at the same time, how can I do it? Can I teach some of the objectives from the Program of Studies easily and efficiently with the whole group in the morning and then, in the afternoon, take time for project work? I'm wondering where my balance will be. I liked Sylvia's suggestion to start off slowly. Pick an afternoon or even one class period and try it. I don't want to jump in with both feet and make a mess of it.

Rachael: I want to integrate a lot of my subjects and I think the Project Approach is a vehicle in which to do this. My concern is with library access. Our school library isn't open for kids yet because they are still cataloguing. I have to access the public city library, which isn't bad, but I can only take out four books at a time. I took a couple of friends with their kids and took some books out in their names. But you do need a well-stocked library and lots of good resources to make the Project Approach work. I know I'll have difficulty with that. But I like the end result - the accountability. But, I also think the onus is placed on me to keep very good records of who's doing what. I think I need to be a better observer - a better "kid-watcher." I want to do it anyway and I think this approach will give me a little push.

As for using the Project Approach, we'll start off with two half days a week for the first couple of months. Why? Number one, because I need to just get my feet wet first - that way I'm not jumping in without my life preserver. That gives me time to have the principal and the other grade two teacher see that what I'm doing is okay. They can be assured that my kids will finish grade two and they won't be behind. The grade two teachers are a little concerned this week about whether or not our kids will learn the skills that they feel are needed. They are a very structured team right now. Number two, I have to overcome the problem of having to fill out a timetable that says exactly how many minutes for each subject. I know I don't **have** to do it that way, but that's the way you have to do it. I have to submit the form in triplicate. And I have to add it with my old calculator to make sure I've got the right number of minutes and, heaven help me if I have an extra minute! Can't be having that!

Marie: I'm having a difficult time with starting right now, because I'm not crazy about the school topic. This year it's "Halloween." I'm wondering, how can I integrate subjects when I don't even teach all the subjects? But I will try to integrate them anyway, even though there are all kinds of other activities that we are required to do around the school theme. That's going to be my small start.

> The part I'm most concerned about is the field trips. In the workshop we chose our field trip, but how much choice should I give the kids? For example, we are going to do historical issues in Alberta. So how can I give them a choice of what they can work on? Where could they go? I can see how some kids could be doing "fur trade" and some doing "Indians," but how do I handle field trips?
>
> But I really like the idea of a final display. Brad thought the workshop activities that we did in phase three were kind of narrow, but I thought, "Goodness, that's the only way I can evaluate what the students do." I need an end product, because this is good communication to the parents and administrators. It was the part of the approach that I liked best. When you get to grade four, there has to be accountability for curriculum content. I don't know if I should feel that way about it or not, but that's the way I see it. I told my kids this year that if you catch yourself doing two things at once, maybe that's because I'm trying to "kill two birds with one stone." I might be reading to you and you might be drawing pictures while I'm reading. I expect the kids to make good use of their time.

Summary

This research study had its beginnings in the **Program Continuity Policy**, a provincial change mandated by the Department of Education in Alberta, but consistent with international education restructuring efforts. The **Project Approach** is a pedagogical approach which addresses the principles of the Program Continuity Policy, thus focusing on experiential learning for elementary school students. This approach was introduced to central Alberta teachers during a workshop in which they became actively involved in an adult learning project. I was a participant observer at the workshop, and used my field notes to prepare an overview of my interpretations. Three of the four teachers in the research study were involved in this particular workshop, while the fourth participant studied the same approach at university. Generally, the teachers evaluated the

Project Approach Workshop positively; however, the research participants, while anxious to experiment with the approach in their classrooms, were somewhat less enthusiastic about the workshop itself. **Profiles** of the four teachers, and their **initial plans** for using the Project Approach, set the stage for an interpretation of their perspectives during the collection and analysis of data throughout the study.

CHAPTER VI

THE STORIES OF PROJECT WORK

> In saying something to you, I not only present a text, but I expose, discover, present and offer myself to you, who happens to hear me. You surprise me by coming to me. Even if I invited you, I must face a disturbance of my world. Indeed, your entering into my dwelling place interrupts the coherence of my world; you disarrange my order in which all things familiar to me have their proper place, function, and time.
>
> Adriaan Peperzak, 1989, p. 15-16

Introduction

This chapter contains the descriptive and interpretive reports of the projects carried out in the classrooms of the research participants. These stories were reconstructed using transcripts from the group session dialogue, individual interviews, and journal data. The teachers' voices are in regular print. My interpretations are in italics and the teachers' interpretations, one year or more after the authoring of their stories, are in bold print. The project work narratives are written as brief case studies, with individual sections for each teacher's classroom story. I have organized the story events in chronological order to provide the sequence necessary to see the changing perspectives of the teachers as they become more comfortable with what they are doing, also presenting the teachers' summary thoughts after the completion of the initial eight month data collection period. In addition, I have included the voices of some of the children as I provide selected reflections from students in the classrooms of the research participants. The project stories conclude with the most recent teacher interpretations as they respond to their stories "after the fact," as well as personal interpretations of the meaning of these experiences from my perspective. I shared the completed stories with the research participants for corroboration and, in so doing, gained additional insight into the reflective inquiry of each individual teacher. While the "interpretation of the final interpretation" is not included, it must be recognized as another layer of meaning that guided personal understanding as my writing progressed.

Because the initial stories end at the completion of the eight-month data collection period, they may appear unfinished to the reader. Perhaps this is symbolic of the unfinished nature of the learning process; we are always challenged to complete a story which has no precise or predictable ending. Perhaps the stories conclude naturally with the final reflections of the teachers and myself as researcher. In this case, the ending of each particular project work narrative is also open to the interpretation of the reader.

The narratives are individual, each teacher telling the story in his or her own unique ways. Some teachers naturally became more reflective than others during the narration; others tended to be more concrete and descriptive. The particular style of each story, and the language used by the participant, reveals the essence of its author and demonstrates the meaning making process for that individual person. I begin with Ashley's story, continue with the stories of Brad and Rachael, and conclude the chapter with Marie's story, up until the time she left the study.

I'm Just Not Comfortable With It Yet

Project Work in Ashley's Grade Three Classroom

October, 1991:

My project work is focused on the centers that I do every Wednesday afternoon. We're doing a school-wide theme again this year, on Halloween, but I don't think that it's as good as last year's fairytale theme. Because we do "Halloween" every year anyway, it's not as good a topic, and I don't think some of the parents approve of this theme either. It might be over soon - thank goodness!

But I did add a couple of different kinds of centers about Halloween that we have never done before - more talking about what they had done on Halloween in other years. I wanted them to write and draw pictures, but we were really pressed for time, so we didn't do much. I told them to talk to their moms and dads about what kinds of costumes they wore when they were young, just to give some background.

Generally, my centers are going really well. I have eleven new ones and we're going to add one more. My first question was, "How am I going to get these kids in the centers and not have all twenty kids doing a painting project? Do I assign them? Well no, that takes away choice." And I want "choice" to be the really important part. So, what I went to was a lottery system - I put all their names in a basket and numbered the centers. Then I decided four kids can go to the painting center and drew out the names. I changed the numbers for each center each week, depending on the focus. I also set up a rule that if you do an arts and crafts activity, you can't do another one the next week. You have to do a language arts or math or music or something else, but you can't go from painting to drawing to puppets. Those are all arts and craft activities and that's the only thing most of them want to do. After everyone is done, their names move up on the list, and they pick numbers again and do another lottery. And they don't mind it. At first some kids said, "I didn't get the center that I wanted." But I said, "You made a choice." And that was the fairest way I could come up with to give them a choice; someone always has to go last and some are always going to be first. So, it's sort of "luck of the draw" and they accept that.

Creative writing in the language arts center seems to be the least popular activity. They have to get their work done before they move on. They have to do a rough copy, check it over themselves, get a friend to check it too, and then bring it to me for corrections. Then they go back and do a good copy. They'd rather do lots of other things besides that - like making puppets instead of writing stories! It takes them a long time to do all the editing, but maybe near the end I'll let them do more free creative writing. I don't want them to have to stay there for three weeks so that's all they'd be able to get done. Actually, I came up with the idea of listing their names on the board so ten or fifteen kids wouldn't be waiting for me to check over their writing. It really bothered me that all those kids were standing around doing nothing. It was defeating the purpose of what I was doing. So now they can go start a new center and I'll call them when it's their turn. They're doing something productive now and that solved the problem.

We gradually shut down for the last half hour each Wednesday so we can share - talk about how you think this center went over and what you didn't like. Then share feelings about the centers, like how you feel when you don't get the one you wanted. Or maybe teach the class a song they made up at the music center. They have to be prepared to share. It was neat how some kids taught us a song verse by verse. They sang it and we sang it back and so on. During sharing time, I'm part of the class - I'm not really a teacher. I had one little boy who chose a center card task where he had to memorize a pumpkin song. Because he's so shy, I said that if he got a partner, then they could memorize it, but if he did it alone, I would let him read the words. He came back and said, "I'll do it on my own." I was so proud of him. Last year, the teacher said he didn't even talk to her at all until November. First, he said he didn't want to get up in front of the class and sing by himself. But I put the tape on for him and we sang it together. But I didn't really sing - I just stood beside him.

I added a math center and a music center this month. So now I have two more subjects integrated. And I have kids coming up in math time and saying, "Hey, I know. We could do this in the math center." During music, Kyle came up and said, "I've got an idea for what you can put in the music center. You can put the tape on and have the kids sing into it and then play back the best of the songs." And when I add their ideas to the centers, they say, "WOW! We've got something new!" I think if I ever skipped center time, they would kill me! I'd like to integrate some more subjects now.

The only major problem with the center approach is the loudness and "goofing off" - especially at the drama center. I'm not sure if it was the activity itself, or the combination of kids who went to the center. I wonder if I could have dealt with the problem better if I had been more organized? Next time, I'll try to put Cody, Tyler and Kyle at different centers. Maybe I could have used more low key reminders first, as things started to get out of control? I think that I should have kept the costumes out of the center until the children got settled into the dramatic activities. The costumes were quite distracting.

I guess we are in Phase II of our project work, but I find it really difficult to follow along with "projects," as we only have center time one day a week. I suppose that doesn't really matter, but I'm not sure? The more I think about it, the better I like the idea of doing a "centers display" for the parents. Maybe this would be like Phase III of a project? I knew centers would be more work, but I admit that I have been surprised by how much more work it really is! I also find it interesting how, even though I am aware of what the children can do, I quite often plan an activity that is too tough for them. It's hard to remember that things that adults can do so easily can be so difficult for children. I have to keep this in mind.

I've been really worried that I'm not doing the Project Approach right. I keep thinking, "Am I doing it wrong?" And then Donna called and said, "Do it however it works for you." I wrote in my journal and I thought, "I'm stupid to be worrying about this. I'm doing it for me." The Project Approach is so structured and I know that the way I'm doing it would probably be considered "wrong." Again it depends on your vision.

November, 1991:

Yesterday was a particularly crazy day because we went to the local museum all afternoon. This field trip fits in well with our social studies unit - Community: Past, Present, and Future, as well as the new theme in language arts, which is also about the past, present and future. I started off with a small unit from the textbook and then will move into a novel study. This is working out to be like a project and is even well-timed! The children were responsible for gathering information, and that's very project-like, too. What's amazing is that I didn't consciously set out to do this. I just thought that the children would get more out of the field trip if they took notes and drew pictures. I had a lot of trouble getting volunteers to help, but at the last minute, more mothers showed up and it worked out well. The children were well behaved and I was impressed. I was so proud of Andrew. He asked the tour guide four questions! I'll have to remember to give the children jobs the next time we go on a field trip, as it would have been more effective if it had been better planned.

But, I didn't start with Phase I for this project - the kid's memories. I was sitting on my couch watching television, and I just came up with the ideas myself. The kids are really not ready to come up with their own ideas yet. This class is different than the one that I had last year. I'm not sure if they are more immature, or if they missed out because they had a lot of substitute teachers last year, or if they were just in a really structured class before. They seem to need to be told what to do continuously. They cannot think on their own and it's driving me crazy! When I go out of the room to get some construction paper, I have five people standing waiting for me to tell them what to do when I come back. It's so frustrating compared to how independent my kids were last year. When we do art, I get twenty-one of almost the identical same things. I think my job this year is to make these kids independent learners that can function on their own - to have a personal interest and to be able to follow it up.

I wasn't too excited about setting up centers for this topic, but I did get them going. I'm been so busy with report cards, that I only have six centers right now. One is to write a story about the future. I told them that would be easy, because they couldn't be wrong! Another one is a religion center that is appropriate for past, present, and future. I want them to think about what it was like when Jesus was alive and what it might be like in heaven in the future and what we can do to make the world a better place in the present. First I was worried that "religion" wouldn't fit, but then I talked to Sally, our grade five teacher, and it just hit me! We also have a viewing center with a filmstrip projector about the pioneers. I have some materials on space for the future; some on the Aztecs, dinosaurs and fossils for the past. One girl did have a great idea in the creative writing center. She wrote about a time machine that went into the past and into the future. Off the top of my head, I told them about this clanging, slashing, blinding light when the machine went off. Then I said that they could do much better when they really thought about it. Another girl wrote about death and said she was dying. I got her to add lots more details and her second copy was much better than the first draft. So creative writing is really working much better this time. I also set up a "thinking center" where they have to think of a problem in the world today and tell me how they could solve it. Another new one is a word search and a cross word puzzle activity.

It is so important for the kids to share what they've done during centers, and I need to make sure that we take the time to do this every Wednesday. The trouble is finding the time - just like for everything else! I was finding it almost impossible to cope with the stress of so many kids wanting me to do so much. I had a mother helper in the other day, and what a difference! It gave me the time to add some new activities in the arts and crafts center. I'm also trying to do more record keeping. I find it tough to have time to remember and record what I notice about the children during the day.

I have been doing something about those kids who are not working the way that they should be. I had a few kids who were not working on their novel study, so I made a list of those who didn't complete their regular work, and they don't get to go to centers. Not one of my little puppies went to creative writing in the beginning! So I fixed them. I said, "Because no one went to creative writing, everyone has to go there for their second center." I am finding this is working and they are writing some good stories.

I added Christmas centers last week. I asked the children for any suggestions of activities they wanted to do in the centers. I got a list of fourteen possible activities! That saved me some time and helped the children take more ownership of the centers. We did a Christmas art activity that I decided to do more as a group project. I read the chapter from the book Donna sent me on "cooperative learning" suggestions. Before I started the project, we talked about how to work effectively in a group, and the children came up with ideas about what they could do to make a group work together better. This really seemed to help.

January, 1992:

I have set a goal for myself. I want to start doing some educational reading every day, starting this week. I think I need to refresh my memory on child development to be sure that my expectations of the children are "developmentally appropriate."

I had trouble coming up with a topic for a new and exciting theme. I skipped Phase I for "Halloween," "Past, Present and Future," and "Christmas," but I decided that I'd better try to do it for my new theme. I did a dragon theme last year, but according to the Project Approach, I really shouldn't do a topic like that. Also, I know there is the issue of choosing a topic that is important and relevant to the children, like "Toys," "The Body," or "Seasons," but the question is, "Do I really want to do any of those?" I know it shouldn't matter what I want, but the truth is that it does matter. I can't get the kids excited and motivated about a topic that I don't care about. That's one reason why I did eventually decide on "Knights, Castles, Dragons" as my new theme. There's a couple of related stories in language arts that gave me the idea last year, but mostly I want to do it again because the kids liked it - and so did I! I love fantasy and I hate doing all reality things! I loved doing imaginative things in school myself. I did consider giving the kids a choice to make the theme more project-like than it was when I did it last year. But I'm just not comfortable with it yet. Marie and I did discuss it and I thought that I could let some kids do mystical creatures and let others do a fairy tale topic and maybe others could do castles, or wizards, or magicians. But I didn't feel ready to do it that way, so everyone is working on this same topic.

Even though it is more of a theme, I did start with Phase I, and my first experience with this approach was positive. First we talked about what the kids knew about dragons. I was really impressed how well it worked. I didn't know they'd know so much about dragons, like all the magical stuff and how they come from eggs and are different colors. They knew so much that I filled up two big chart papers with their ideas. Then we watched a video called The Flight of the Dragons, to see if their knowledge was right or not. It was really neat that many of their ideas were confirmed, but sometimes they said, "No, we were wrong." They seemed interested to hear it from another person's point of view.

When I do Phase I another time, I won't do brainstorming as a whole group activity on one class chart. I'd give everyone a book of their own to write in first and then we'd share ideas afterwards. We have twenty books for the theme so far, except there are only story books for dragons. So I guess I'll have to go with that. I plan to have the kids construct castles, but we haven't got that far yet. We're still working on our dragon books - life cycle of a dragon. And they made some dragons out of plasticine - adult ones, baby ones and eggs.

This theme is going on all the time, as we do related daily activities in language arts and art. But, I haven't integrated it during math, social studies or music time. The only song that I can think of is "Puff, the Magic Dragon!" I'm still doing centers every Wednesday afternoon, and they begin by selecting one center to go to from a choice of about six. It usually lasts for about two hours. It depends on their interest how long they stay at each one. The kids say that center time goes by so fast, and I agree. Their chalk drawings were really good. Matthew is one of my weakest students and he has been been putting in a lot of effort and doing a spectacular job! He doesn't usually take a lot of time with art work, so I hope this becomes a trend. He needs something to feel really good about in school. One girl spent two full center times painting her castle with lots of detail. She mixed some nice gray paint and painted in all the little bricks and turrets and windows - even a draw bridge with all the chains. Then another girl only spent twenty minutes and wasn't interested at all. You can see by the final product who took the most time!

February, 1992:

Now we're into Phase II of "Knights, Castles, and Dragons" and they're busy doing research. They work for about forty five minutes or an hour each day because they work in language arts time. I think this works better than long blocks of time because they don't get a chance to get tired of it. They're not complaining now - probably because they know they get to do it again the next day. Actually a lot of them are into constructing something now. They are constructing lots of castles, but didn't get interested in doing one big class construction. I have a clay and cardboard model of a knight and some are working with that. We had a talk last week about how you need to have a lot of information before you can begin making a project. But some of the topics are really hard to research, like how dragons breathe fire and how they fly. We got tired of looking at bat, bird, and airplane books to try to put it together. So we decided to watch Flight of the Dragon again to see if we could find something to answer those questions.

I just told the kids to pick whatever topic interests them and to make knights, castles, or dragons. We did brainstorm things they might do to learn more, but they could choose whatever they wanted to do and whoever they wanted to do it with. My request was that they had to make up a list of questions and then tell me what they would do to answer those questions. They got off on that, and I just let them go with it. The largest group size is two and one child wanted to work alone. Two others started off alone, but then they joined up. Michelle was doing a castle and Marie was doing a play and now they are doing it together. I thought we would only spend two or three weeks on it, and now it must be six weeks. Mostly the groups are only made up of two kids. This is the part that happens in the language arts period. Our center time is still on this theme, but they don't work on their group projects then. The center time is painting, drawing, reading, writing, research, and puppets - all centered around the topic.

There are many activities being organized for Phase III. I asked them if they'd be done by Monday and they said, "No." So we decided to begin presentations on Friday. I told them they needed to complete a written story about the things that they had made. And if the parents are interested and the kids are willing, I might invite them. But, I might just invite students from another classroom to see some of the presentations - those of the children who want to share. One group is interested in tournaments. They have researched different sports in tournaments and they are doing a little play. Another group is doing castles and how they're built. Some focused on King Arthur's life and they read related story books. Two girls wanted to find out about ghosts that haunt castles, so that's what they're doing. And then there's the group that's researching how the dragon flies and breathes fire. They didn't relate it to real birds or planes, although I pushed for it, but no interest. These kids are some of my most creative kids so I'm really curious about what they're going to do. Some kids are doing a newspaper with want ads and articles. I think some of the projects are really exciting, but I'm not too impressed with others. But I'm trying hard not to have any prejudgments, even though it's hard not to have a picture in your head of what these things could be like. I have two little girls that got help from a brother and a mom to make a report. Mom showed them how to make an outline and put it together and they've been spending a lot of time outside of class time. When they started working on it out of class, then other kids did, too. Some kids wouldn't think of doing that!

I guess we're doing kind of a project on social studies, too, using the communities suggested in the curriculum guide. We are looking at different communities, like we did last year. But this year - I don't know what happened to me - a light just came on! There is a community recommended for study and we do have a textbook with materials, but to make it more real for the kids, I decided to have them write to someone in that community. I went to the Chamber of Commerce and told them we would be studying their community and asked them if they could send us materials. and the names and addresses of some schools there. We spent last week writing letters to a grade three class in their community. I'll ask them to write us back. Some of the kids are thinking that they might get a pen pal. In their letters, they asked, "What's it like to live there?" No book in the world will tell you what they will find out from asking another child. They realize that the children in another province learn different things than we do. Some of them said things like, "I play hockey. What do you play?"

March, 1992:

After we finished "Knights, Castles and Dragons," I picked my next project from a unit in science called, "Woodland Study," and decided to broaden the topic to include animals, so it could be linked with a theme in language arts. I'm going to add a novel study. In social studies we can link it to how animals need each other just like communities need each other. Art and music can probably also be integrated quite easily. I called the project "Woodland Animals," and we work on it during language arts and for three science periods each week. I did Phase I of this animal project differently than I did last time. I put them in groups of three, and had them name all the animals that they could think of. Then I wanted them to classify them into groups like zoo animals, wild animals, farm animals, that kind of thing. But they did it totally differently than I thought that they would! Some identified reptiles and others came up with the cat family. So I went with their groupings. Then, I introduced the idea of habitat and tried to get them to classify where the animals might live - in the field, in the forest, under ground. Next I want them to do some writing and maybe draw some pictures. But I want them to do it anyway they want, from what they know about animals.

Summary Thoughts - April, 1992:

At the beginning of the year, I realize that I just picked parts of the Project Approach to incorporate into my teaching. I chose to work with a very simplified version of project work, basically just centers - Phase II. As time passed, minor adjustments were made when new ideas came to me. There was still a lot of teacher control in all this. After encouragement from the other teachers in our group, I expanded the approach to include Phases I and III.

It was interesting to determine the children's interests and focus points. In many cases, it was quite different from where I would have gone on my own. For example, I would have focused on "dragons," but the children's interests were on "castles" and "knights." In my last project on "animals," I was pleased with the results, but I still find it hard to give up control to the children. If I give over the control to them, then I'm not sure what they're learning or how to evaluate their learnings. I'm still trying to work this all out, because I do believe that it is important to give the children more power over their learning.

It is difficult to integrate curriculum goals and subjects using this approach; but, in a way, this kind of teaching is easier than using a traditional style. It frees you to allow the children to use their own ideas and this results in more excitement and joy in learning. For me, there is still room for growth, but there has been a big improvement in my teaching and evaluating skills since the beginning of the year.

Voices of the Students

These were stories written by Ashley's grade three students in May, 1992. She asked them to write what they liked, and didn't like, about centers/project work. The stories are rewritten verbatim, using the original spelling of the students, both to provide authenticity and to show the developmental level of each of the children. Although there is a full range of perspectives, most of the students clearly enjoyed these activities; however, I was especially interested in some of the rather negative perceptions of group work. Also, as Ashley reports, they do seem to love the theme on knights, castles, and dragons and do feel they learned a great deal!

I liked doing pictures and being creative. What I didn't like was brainstorming. I learned a whole lot of things in centers. What I would like to change is the groups and if somebody had the pillow yesterday, he or she can't have it again today.

I like finishing projects. I don't like starting. I lerned that casiles have cheranes. I like center time the best. We could have resess all day becuase then we would not have to work. But we would still get centers becuase it is fun.

I don't like our projects cous I don't like geting imbarest in front of all those people. I like how mutch time she givs us to work on it. The fun part is working on it and plaing with it. I would like to have meors in the halls and windows in our class looking thro the wals.

I lke presenting the project I did in centers. I liked to do knights, castles, and dragons. I leared that when the trees ar really old you make stuff like paper. And I also leared that when you look in a book it is much eseier to tell ansers. I didn't like when we looked at a filliam and coped what you said.

What I like about projects i that we do fun things. What I hate about it is we have to stick with the theam. If we could chose are own theam, I would like it a lot better. How many more theams are there until the rest of the year? What I hate is we have to do a report befor we can do the project.

Wednesday is my favorite time especily in the afternoon when we have centers because we get to pick what we want to be in.

I liked that we had to read books and find lots of information about things. The worst part is that you have to go to the libray to fin books. And writing all the information. My favorite time was brainstorming all the animals. Because it was fun and easy. I would like to change groups. If you could go in groups of four. You could get more ideas and you might get to go with people you haven't before.

Miss B. has neat ideas for us. My funes time is sharing our project. Beacuse you get ideas for are next project. I didn't like who I was working with because she just sat there and did nothing but stear in to space and when I said we could work on it she would make up a exsus. I learn lots but my parnt didn't.

I like how we did projects because it was different and also you could do what you wanted to. I don't like it in some ways because if you had a patner its hard to agree on some ideas. Because when you have a great idea your patner never seems to agee. I don't like groups because if you were near a friend then got seperated in to another group with otheor girls you would not like it like me.

I like making projects because we get partners and we work hard doing it. And the best part is geting the highes markes. I didn't like getting such a low mark in my castle. I would like to be with a girl in my group. I'm stuck with boys and it's not fair. Miss B. sometimes gets a little upset but not very often.

I like making projects because we learn information about the topic. I wish we could get more time to finish our projects. I like to show my project in the middle of the period because people remember it more.

What I like about project work is that I can make models with it. I like centers the best because you learn more then other perieds. I would like to chang harder things into easyer things because then it would be all easyer.

I like presinting the project and doing it with a parter becuse it makes it more fun and I learned that nights have all kinds of diffrent wepons. I don't like Reserch and practing teh play becuse sometimes you have to practice about 20 to 25 times.

I like the marks I get on my project. On my science test I got 89%. My math test was long but I got 91%. I was the only one to get 100% on my knighs, castles, and dragons project. In centers we started a new them is my favroite. Animils. The reson I like that them is you get to draw a lot.

Ashley's Interpretative Reflections: June, 1993:

I want to be the best teacher that I can be! This year I'm taking courses at the university - working on my diploma for language arts. Every night and most weekends, I'm doing course work. It's kind of strange - university rejuvenates me and gives me new ideas, but then I don't have enough time to put all that I learn in place in the classroom. And I put so much pressure on myself. I'm not happy, unless I get top marks. I didn't do as well as I thought I should have in a course last fall, and it made me feel really bad.

My life is really difficult this year. I just can't do it all! Last year I was so focused on the classroom, and I worked most nights planning, and devoted myself to my work. Maybe this year, I'm more realistic - shifting my balance a bit. There's more to life than school, but then I feel really guilty when I say that! I think that I must be a horrible teacher, but I seem to be the only person that feels that way. Parents are impressed with what their kids are learning and the principal is happy with me, but I know that I'm not spending as much time at it, and I'm not coming up with so many new ideas. Perhaps they're just coming more naturally? Anyway, I don't want to fry myself. That's one of the reasons why I decided to start an exercise program.

We did school-wide themes again this year, but it still wasn't as good as it was the first year. There just wasn't the continuity between grades with the "Halloween" theme or with the one school themes that we did this year. We did "Remembrance Day" and that was too advanced for most elementary kids, and then we did "Olympic Games." I just hated that theme, and the most of the kids didn't like it either. And the staff voted to do it again next year! I wish they'd choose something like "Bugs," that all the kids could get interested in at different levels.

I haven't done centers regularly this year. I have the time blocked off on my timetable twice a week, but I don't do it very often at all. I have twenty-eight kids this year, and they are so noisy and boisterous that center time is just too chaotic. When we do them, the arts and crafts rule is still in effect and I still think sharing is important. I didn't use a lottery system this year; there was no limit to how many could go to a particular center. I might go back to the lottery system again, if I did centers more often. I do lots of open-ended activities, but they're all built around subject areas with the whole class. If I get a sub in, then I always plan Center Time, because the kids still love it. It's just too noisy for me!

Last year, I let the kids help with center ideas, and they really liked doing that. They had some neat ideas. When my class left at the end of last year, they were much more independent. This year I haven't let the kids choose center ideas because it takes so much time and energy. Also I'm finding that I'm not coming up with new creative ideas for centers. I'm using the same ones from last year, and maybe that's not a good idea. I want to get back into it again, but not with this group. You and your students have to find a system that works for all of you. I know that it would have given the children more ownership, so I should let the children have input again. I haven't had to keep them from doing other activities this year for not doing creative writing. The kids this year really like writing. I'm not sure why they like it better. I still give them a choice, so maybe it's different kids, or maybe I'm doing it a bit differently. They have to publish three stories a year.

I still find that the kids have different opinions of what they want to investigate. Allowing more freedom of choice and expression helps a teacher to deal with the differences. Everyone makes different connections. We need to give the children freedom so they can make connections for themselves. I still think that teachers need to start small when trying out new ideas and to work up. I need to work more on aspects of subject integration. By the way, my kids did well on the government exam last year!

I worked with the topic, "Knights, Castles, and Dragons," again this year. I still find it effective and these kids liked it, too. Some of their projects were great and some were disappointing. I think it's important to give children the freedom to work, move, and experience. This creates excitement. But I think that it needs to be restricted freedom - not total freedom. Giving children freedom really broadens a topic - it takes flight!

When I got to the animal topic last year, then I think that I was really doing a project! It worked well. Letting the kids use their memories is beneficial. It helps them make connections. The children really enjoyed this project last year and I got some wonderful final projects. I was thinking about our research group last year and remembering how Brad was the most negative about the value of the Project Approach Workshop, and yet he was the one who seemed to get the most out of doing project work in the end.

With all the talk of staff cut-backs in our school, I've been worried. So I went to the superintendent and asked if I could teach junior high next year. He said that I could and I'm excited about it. But I'm also kind of nervous so I might have to go back to putting the kids in rows. When I'm in doubt, I teach the way that I was taught, because I know that works. I'll ease myself in until I get comfortable and then build in more freedom later.

My Interpretation

Ashley tells us that she takes on a student role during center sharing time and says, "I'm not really teacher." Her constructed vision of the "best *teacher" is something out there that she is striving to become. Ashley has created a "teacher construct" that is comfortable for her. Good teachers are popular, knowledgeable, and effective in the eyes of both students and colleagues. She is a good student herself and learns well from good teachers. She knows how teachers and students should behave for this optimum learning to occur, and this comfortable image is reaffirmed by teacher education programs, the educational milieu in which she works, and her own teaching experiences. She has a traditional view of "what works."*

It is not comfortable to try on new roles and explore different ways of being with children. The word "comfort" comes from the Latin word, "confortare," and means "strengthen greatly." Ashley recognizes the absence of this inner strength during exploration with the Project Approach, as she laments, "I'm just not comfortable with it yet." In an effort to maintain the level of comfort that she achieved during her first year of teaching, she specifically chooses one small aspect of the Project Approach - small group learning activities that she refers to as "centers." Because she used many whole group, hands-on activities with her students the year before, the "activity focus" is somewhat familiar and therefore comfortable; however, she sets out to add the small group dimension and an element of choice to her previous plans. From this beginning, she slowly reaches out to a cope with the uncertainty of new pedagogical approaches - moving ever so carefully out of her comfort zone into unknown areas.

Ashley seems uncomfortable in her teaching role when she loses sight of her original vision of "teacher." She expresses this discomfort when she mourns the pressure of time constraints, the demands of dependent students, and the external expectations around student evaluation - all elements related to the change process with which she is struggling. During these *times, Ashley reverts to the comfortable approaches that she knows well - she takes away center time from children who "were not working on their novel study," sets rules for the selection of centers, gives percentage grades on completed projects, and worries that she is doing project work "wrong." Dialogues with colleagues and teaching models in her school reinforce her perspectives of "good teaching" and return her to a comfortable and secure place.*

Discomfort for Ashley comes from loss of control. She says, "I still find it hard to give up control to the kids." She struggles with issues of behavior management (loudness and goofing off, noisy and boisterous students) and organizational structure (center lottery systems, planning strategies, brainstorming techniques), all the time sensing the potential for failure of the new teaching image with which she is experimenting. Ashley talks about the importance of student choice, but cannot always allow herself to give the children free choices. While she recognizes her own excitement when she comes up with new ideas, and also acknowledges that children have more ownership when they create their own learning activities and make connections for themselves, she has trouble empowering children, fearing loss of her own power. When the children didn't go to the creative writing center, she takes control of the situation, and says, "So I fixed them." She imposed a negative consequence for the particular behavior with which she was unhappy. She says, "This is working," and for Ashley, this means the required writing product is being completed to meet her expectations.

Power is central to Ashley's view of teaching. "Freedom" and "control" are polarized concepts very much in conflict within Ashley as she tries to construct a new teaching reality. She reflects on possible choices for a new topic, considering many alternatives more in line with the Project

Approach, but instead chooses to do a theme which includes "dragons," because she is comfortable with the results from last year's class. Also, just as she is stating her belief in "freedom of choice and expression," she is concurrently recognizing that her students performed well on the provincial achievement tests. The place of power in Ashley's view of teaching is an uncomfortably noisy intrusion, disturbing her sense of equilibrium, as she struggles with a yet undefined perspective of what she calls "restrictive freedom." Ironically, she is ultimately controlled by the very images of teaching that she is seeking to change.

From the beginning, Ashley demonstrated an awareness of the emotional behaviors of individual children. As the study progressed, I believe that she was beginning to see beyond her traditional perspective of teaching. In exploring new frontiers, she experienced small but significant "breakthroughs," acknowledging them with comments like, "It just hit me," "A light just came on," and "new ideas came to me." She says of project work, "I'm doing it for me;" she recognizes the value of experience as she says, "No book in the world will tell you what they will find out from asking another child;" she acknowledges that her judgmental behavior may be harmful and tries to allow the children more individuality; she exclaims, "What's amazing is that I didn't consciously set out to do this;" she negotiates with students to determine new deadlines for project completion. She also recognizes that the construction of new realities may involve building on the ideas of others, as she says, "I want to refresh my memory on child development to be sure my expectations of the children are developmentally appropriate." and "This really seemed to help," after using a book on cooperative learning suggestions.

This research project gave Ashley new language and new ways of viewing teaching and herself. She expresses pleasure that her first experience with Phase I of the project is positive. Her last animal project did appear to help her build confidence in her ability to use new ideas in such a way as to make her changing practices feel successful. During the study, she became increasingly less focused on the "I" of organizational planning and more sensitive to her students' needs, showing pride in more of their individual accomplishments and sometimes "letting go" of total teacher control, allowing students more creative opportunities. She says, "They got off on that and I just let them go with it." After encouraging some students to research a topic in a particular way, she says, "I pushed it - but there was no interest;" she didn't force them to do it her way. At the end of the eight month period, she seemed to be "growing into" her new language of classroom "freedom" and "choice."

However, Ashley was not able to maintain the momentum she was experiencing at that time. The following year, she returned to her more comfortable place and says of her former change, "It takes so much time and energy" and "I can't face it with this group." She has also created for herself a more balanced life style. She feels that she will probably return to even more traditional methods next year, when in a new teaching situation, and predicts that "I will teach the way that I was taught." Ashley is still caught in a struggle between the contrasting images of the teaching and learning process, as she continues to strive to be a "better teacher" by returning to post secondary education.

Perhaps this professional learning experience will provide her with a support system like the one under which she experienced slight shifts in perspective during the study. On the other hand, it may promote the "status *quo" - keeping Ashley comfortable with the successes she is currently experiencing as she interacts with children. parents, and colleagues. While it is impossible to predict the direction in which Ashley's teaching career may go, or the types of changes that she may adopt during her journey, I do know that fundamental pedagogical change is not easy - or comfortable!*

The Kids Were The Ones Who Saw The Patterns On The Fences

Project Work in Brad's Grade One Classroom

October, 1991:

I brought photos from our Post Office Project to share with you all, but I'm not sure about how I'm doing it. It sort of just happened. We spent about an hour a week on it, maybe more some weeks. I began by unwrapping a present in front of the class. All of the children could relate to presents, and only one student said she had not received a present in the mail. We started by doing some "memory sketches" of anything related to the post office. It was exciting to watch them draw planes, trucks, and mailboxes. The discussion that followed was full of past experiences. Jennifer excitedly talked about the invitation that she had received in the mail to be flower girl at her auntie's wedding. They all had lots to say!

Before we went on the field trip, I organized them so that when they got there each person would have a task to do. We made little clip boards out of cardboard with clothes pins on them. The kids looked like little professors walking down the street. They thought they were really important, and they were super excited. I think the postmistress was a little taken back with all their enthusiasm. First, she took them around but, because they'd been there for kindergarten, they didn't need much introduction. When they sat down on stools (like the ones the employees use for sorting mail or when they're serving customers), their feet were about four feet off the ground and they looked really cute, sitting up there and drawing pictures from observation.

Courtney and Ryan went out front to draw the stamp vending machine and letter receiver. Chris jumped up on a high stool and began to draw the adding machine. Sean stood close by, looking like he wished that he had a high stool. C.J. looked very professional as he sat at the main counter and sketched the weigh scale. Angela took great delight in drawing the cancelling machine and Tanisha was equally excited about drawing the desk area with its tape dispenser, pen and other accessories. She even included the flower design on the front of the filing cabinet. Nathan and Bridget sat with the Postmistress in the inner lobby to record times and dates of mail receipts and despatches. Nathan, my usually stubborn and unmotivated boy, and Bridget, my quiet, methodical girl, were totally engrossed with recording the letters' dots and numbers with great precision. She made sure they dotted their "i's" and crossed their "t's" and did semicolons, the whole bit! And they sat there like little angels, listening to every word doing exactly as she said. The kids were undistracted by customers coming and going. One little guy finished his drawing inside and he went outside to look at the front of the building. He came back in with a sign that said "EGT" and I had no idea what he had done. Then I thought that he was trying to spell "Greensville" and didn't get it very well, but it wasn't until I got back to the school that I realized he was trying to copy the postal code. He had started it too close to the edge of his paper and it was both backwards and scrambled!

When we came back, we elaborated the sketches into paintings and Peggy, the teacher next door, couldn't believe how quiet and involved the children were. The paintings were wonderful and, at this point, I thought the project might be actually going okay! Their interest during this period was at a good level - not too high to create false hopes, nor too low to continue to carry us. Then we did constructions! Milk cartons turned into mail boxes with box numbers. Cereal boxes turned into adding machines and stamp dispensers. Shoe boxes became a cancelling machine and a mail receivers. The construction zoomed along at a furious, almost desperate, speed. Within forty minutes, most kids had made something to place in the post office. Several students alternated working on a stamp display with construction work. More than a few kept returning to me asking what they could do next. Most times I sent them to help someone else with their construction project. Much cooperation and collaboration was evident. When I told them that the time had come to put everything away, their complaints reminded me of times when my mother called us in from play! Obviously, they were enjoying the activities! Also, there was not one misbehavior during the time we worked at the project activities.

One day we spent the whole afternoon on the project. What a great time - some finished the stamp collection, some drew a flag, others painted the brick front of our post office. Two girls constructed a sign and everyone designed and produced a stamp. The queen stamps were beautiful. Maybe I should send them to the queen! The teacher's aide took the kids to the photocopier and produced miniature replicas of their designs. We then dropped into the principal's office to show him our work. The kids went home that day feeling very important. I left with similar feelings.

They got busy writing letters to each other. Every spare moment, they would pull out paper and pens, felts, or crayons. I was constantly saying, "Clean off your desks. Put everything away." But I experienced a warm, fuzzy feeling to have my students this involved in a project! The kids also got really excited about the dramatic play. They got some old ties and glasses and dressed up. We brought in two telephones, so one kid could phone the post office and have another one answer. He'd say, "When will you be open?" and the other one would say, "OK, I'll be right there!" and he'd reply, "I'll bring my letter right down." Generally, the classroom feels friendly - I guess because it's mine! But I think that my kids feel the same way too. We have surrounded ourselves with **our** work and it's an effort that we can all be proud of.

I took the kids to my house to make pumpkin cookies for the parents when they came to see our "Post Office." The food was a smash hit, as was our project. Fifteen of eighteen kids had a parent come - with letters! The postmistress and the principal also came. Each student took his or her mom or dad (two dads came) to process his or her letter and then presented the parent with a letter written by the child. It was an experience well worth the preparation! I handed out a Project Explanation and told the parents to give me a call if they had any questions or concerns. Two moms chided me that they realized this whole thing was to rationalize "play" at school. I didn't disagree! One mom told me that it should be illegal to have so much fun at one's job. I guess I didn't disguise my enjoyment very well!

Throughout the project, I kept worrying about how quickly the days passed by. I never seemed to get time for my next step in the project. I kept wondering if I was doing too much or too little, and if I was allowing the project to really break loose. I really wanted the students to be engaged in a "whole" activity. My goal this year is to integrate everything as much as possible, so I know the project idea fits. But I also want the kids to get actively involved and excited about their work. I want them to know that learning is fun and comes from within. I want them to experience success and to feel intrinsic motivation. I know that many of the activities that I did during September were the "spoonfed type," but now I want more! I hope this project promoted the idea of "learning for the sake of learning". I have been concerned about the lack of centers during the Post Office project, but I now think that this approach has been better than a dozen centers! For one thing, the students cooperated and collaborated in every aspect of the project - field trips, discussions, constructions, dramatic play, etc. There was no fragmentation of activities, and yet there were enough different "sides" to the project that choice was the motivator. These activities were most often student generated and we sometimes had three or four things going at one time. Other times, we all did the same thing, with everyone adding their individual touch.

I read two government documents and both were continually talking about integration, whole child, activity, relevancy, meaning, engaging, facilitating, industry, self-competence, and on and on. For each time one of these words is mentioned, somewhere the idea of projects pops up for me. Every time I read those words, I feel better about myself as a teacher, realizing that, for the first time, I am taking advantage of the opportunity to realize the goals that I always had - but didn't know how to put into practice. I know the project gave me and the kids a sense of industry and satisfaction that no amount of seatwork could have accomplished. It seems to reach the advanced student, the slower student, and all those at every level in between.

I did hear a few negative comments and received a couple of positive ones from colleagues about our project. One male teacher commented that the project approach was not suitable to the Alberta Curriculum and a female teacher remarked that this approach is an "all or nothing" strategy. I must confess that I have had both those mind-sets at times. My vice principal gave me an enthusiastic shot in the arm by praising us on our project. Another veteran teacher commented on how much her kids liked our post office. I think that change is easier when others recognize that a new way is valid and, even more valuable, when they actually voice their feelings.

One thing I got out of Sylvia's workshop, and out of her book, is that you should choose a topic that's familiar to you - for me, the post office. I used to work there so I have good background. I didn't have to do a lot of extra work for my first project and so it was a good one to start with. It went really, really well, and I think that was one of the reasons.

November, 1991:

Peggy and I met to begin planning our school project. She has great ideas for a unit, which she has taught for the last couple of years. I was worried about whether a unit could develop into a project.

We started out the project by going on a school yard walk, spending about forty five minutes wandering around the school yard, kicking and picking rocks, pulling wild grass, weeds and cattails, collecting odd shaped tree branches and just enjoying the warm fall weather. When we returned, our room looked like an upturned archaeological site! Many kids went home with pockets, backpacks, and lunch kits full of rocks, leaves, and bottle caps. I wondered what they told their parents about the school learning that took place that day!

Next, we discussed memories of playgrounds, expectations of the school project, and they drew their favorite playground, from memory. They really enjoyed drawing and it was a great set to talk about rules and responsibilities.

We then rearranged the furniture to provide space for school bus and a more inviting, and yet private, reading area. As it turned out, the eight foot long shelf unit has become the beginning of a bus. With the back facing the desks, it is a natural form for a bus. I covered the back with white paper and the kids can paint it yellow and black. They wanted to paint it right away, but I told them we needed to wait until after our field trip. In the meantime, I used their anticipation of the construction to prepare them to observe in greater detail during the field trip. I wanted to discuss more memories of school, but instead we got side tracked and discussed what we wanted to learn or see when we visited the bus. Being that it was their topic, we had one hundred percent involvement in the discussion.

One day, we spent over an hour sketching equipment and other things of interest around the school. Several boys sprawled out in the principal's office to sketch items on his desk. I wasn't sure what Becky was drawing. She was facing the photocopier, but her drawing looked nothing like a photocopier. She told me that it was a sketch of the computer, which was directly behind her. She had taken a good look and proceeded to draw it from memory. Most of the students drew more than one picture. Many boys were fascinated with the rows of switches on the intercom panel. We finished the tour by taking the long way back - through the staff room, workroom, shop, business education room, and the science lab, where we saw specimens. The kids were warmly welcomed by the senior typing class and each child was able to listen to dictation on the Dictaphone. Not one child got bored!

Another positive experience was interviewing workers in our school. We paired up with a grade seven students from Melissa's room, using a previously prepared interview form. They interviewed about twelve adults in the school - all the way from the janitor to the librarian to the distance education coordinator. In less than thirty minutes they returned with the completed forms. It was a good experience for both the grade seven students and my grade one students. I was happy to find a "kindred spirit" in the school. It's neat to be on exactly the same wave length with another teacher - like I am with Melissa. It certainly was a Program Continuity experience!

Another day, eight grade four students helped us survey the elementary students, recording how they travel to school. When we returned, we constructed a chart combining all the results from everyone's surveys. The grade four students did the calculations. It was interesting to watch them in this leadership role. Some were nervous, but all were very well behaved. That same day, we visited the bus. The kids sketched and talked and talked and sketched. Jaimie did an excellent job of sketching the bus. She not only included lights and mirrors, but much of the lettering, as well.

We went on a tour of the shop with the teacher and his students. They gave my kids demonstrations on several machines and a guided small group tour of the photography lab. After recess, we returned to the empty shop to sketch. Most students sketched two or three machines, and then climbed to the loft to draw birds-eye views of the whole shop. In the afternoon, we talked about construction and brainstormed activities appropriate to the school project. Two girls wanted to organize a classroom library, complete with a check out system. Other ideas were to build a bus, a shop, an office, and a playground.

I really found it difficult to get started on the construction phase of the project. I always seemed to come up with an excuse for not starting! But it did finally get going - a playground, a shop, and a school bus. The kids grouped themselves!! After thirty minutes, the shop group had planned and produced almost the entire shop. The playground group soon had many pieces of equipment in the sand table. The bus group had started painting their bus, but their eyes were on the other two projects. They seemed to think those groups were more exciting. Again the students divided themselves into the other two groups with no problems. After another thirty minutes, some parents arrived to pick up their kids, but the kids didn't want to go home! The room was a real mess, but it only took them about ten minutes to clean up and the exciting day was over. Many kids left saying they would be back early the next day to work on their project.

However, it soon ended! The next day, the kids wanted to take home the machines from the shop. I said they could and, the next thing I knew, the shop was apart and the pieces were disappearing into desks and lockers. They cleaned up the mess and went to their desks to play with the salvaged pieces. By the end of the day, many parts of the playground were dismantled and the remaining school-owned materials were scattered throughout the sand box.

I wondered what prematurely ended our constructions. Was it my lack of attention span or was it theirs? Looking back, I guess it was partly mine and partly theirs - kind of a mutual loss of interest. Why did we lose interest? Or did we? Perhaps we just accomplished what we set out to do! Perhaps our goal was very short-range. How could I have lengthened the time, sustained the interest? Perhaps shop, playground, and bus are too limiting? After this experience, our project seemed at a dead end.

We momentarily did regain some energy one day when we used our puppets and interviews of school workers as a joint grade one and three activity. No substitutes were available one day when the grade three teacher was ill, so I had a brainwave! I used this as an opportunity for my kids to review the information and roleplay when the grade threes were there to help them. The outcome was fantastic! The older children took on the responsibility well and the grade ones were equally enthusiastic. No behavior problems with thirty one kids in a small room for eighty minutes! However, other than that, our project came to a close.

For some reason, I felt a sense of failure. Our post office project was a smash hit, but our school project seemed to be something less. Was it because it was mostly someone else's ideas or was it because it was originally set up as a unit - or both? Sometimes I covet a job in a classroom where I could be free to do my own thing and not feel obligated to keep in step with someone else. I do appreciate Peggy's ideas and her free gifts of materials are helpful, but I want to be independent (I think!). Maybe another possibility is that I don't like the feeling that I'm competing with another person, and this was how I felt doing the school project. I feel like it was Peggy's "baby" and she should get the "glory." She's having parents in on Friday, and she deserves positive feedback on her effort to have her kids do some project work. I guess I shrank back from infringing on her "thing." Perhaps that's why our project ended as it did. Maybe I had unconsciously planned to do so! I know that I sensed right from the beginning that I was not ready to borrow ideas from another teacher when I initially had no input. When I undertake a task, I like it to include my preparations, my thoughts, and my ideas. I guess that kids are no different. It's no wonder that our project didn't fly very high. Both the kids and I were trying to work out someone else's plan.

January, 1992:

I have spent a lot of time thinking about my next project, when all of a sudden I realized that I had better smarten up! It's not just my project. Why should I do all the brain drain? I decided to let the kids in on choosing a project, so we spent about thirty minutes reviewing our two projects and thinking about a new one. I'm not too worried about the product. I've been reading Engaging Children's Minds, again - this time, more slowly and carefully. On page twelve there is a sentence that came clear to me on this reading. It's about a "sense of purpose being just as important as the final product." I wonder why that didn't sink in before? The two projects that have surfaced are "homes" and "hospitals." If we did homes, I could incorporate social studies objectives from the family topic, and the children may get excited if I approached it properly. On the other hand, the hospital project could correlate with both family studies and many health topics. Both could provide opportunities for investigations, constructions, and dramatic play.

I eventually decided to do a hospital topic and videotaped some of their discussion on hospital memories and experiences. We spent two weeks "processing." During this time, I have been continually returning to the idea of product. I need to know where we're going and what product we're going to end up with before we get there! That's the adult way of thinking again - the university trained lesson planner. If only I could break away from that framework for our project studies. But I am realizing that the process is important and I do understand that the project should be organic and should grow as the conditions dictate. I'm thinking that maybe we need a short project to give us some quick success?

All my worrying was for nothing! We watched a film called, Animal Homes and, without planning it, we got into a discussion about our own homes. The project had begun and the impetus for it was the film. I got this brain wave that we could draw our houses. I asked the kids to close their eyes to "see" the pictures of their homes in their memories. I had them focus on what they might look like as they came home from school. Many kids included things like dad's truck sitting in the driveway, the garden, the trees, their swing set, the whole farm yard (corrals and all!), the fancy curtains in the living room, the skylight, some family members, pets, and flowers on the front steps. The day ended with a memories discussion.

Everyone was eager to draw and they have spent hours drawing their homes over the next days. The intensity was exhilarating. I wonder how many students around the world work so hard on one thing for so long? It was always me that ended the activities to get the kids ready to go home. One student was about to use his ruler and I reacted impulsively by asking him to put his ruler away. Flashback!! I remembered Sylvia telling me not to use my ruler during the workshop and I also remembered how that had freed me from my fear of drawing something that wasn't "just perfect." I went to the board and sketched my home - house, trees, van, my daughter's tricycle, the boys playing street hockey. What an experience! I think that the kids were somewhat shocked that I could draw and that I would draw in front of them! So was I! Thirty three years of life and I took a chance with something drastically out of character.

I took a drive through the country two Sundays later. It was amazing! Once I went south and once north, and I found all the kids' homes. And it was amazing how much their homes looked like what they drew! We really haven't done too much more than just drawing so far, but at least we know where we might be headed. I think we've broken through the project deadlock! The kids have given the project a life.

February, 1992:

I must admit that I learned more in several hours than in the last several months about the "hows" of the project approach when I attended the Project Approach workshop that Donna did for our school system. I think that I've been trying to put something into practice which I haven't understood well. I recognize that some of my success with projects has come from experiencing the approach at my own level, but as well I needed another presentation to help me figure out what I was doing! I was anxious to get back into the home project after the workshop.

We've been out again to a house under construction. The kids were really excited. They were to sketch; think about sights, sounds, smells, and textures; and to find problems to be solved using number. I took the video camera and got some excellent footage, but I wasn't able to guide their explorations as well as I should have done. I was upset that they weren't all on task but, upon returning to school and during discussion, I realized that they had heard and seen things that I hadn't noticed! When we got there, some of the kids just wanted to run around and go from this end to that end, look here and look there. I think it was a productive overall experience, but not what I expected them to do. They had their notebooks and Kyle drew five windows and two door equals seven in all. He really got into the math bit. They got interested in the wires and pipes. They were doing the plumbing with plastic pipes so they were all over the floor joists and through the walls and some were sticking up through the floor. They could see all the electrical wires, but nothing was hooked up yet. There were power tools all over the floor - drills and saws that the workers just left wherever they finished using them. The kids were more interested in the power tools than anything else. They drew a lot of power drills in their pictures. They really enjoyed viewing the video and one boy remarked, as he left school, "We didn't do any work today!" We had spent about five periods working on our homes project!

I think the project is still in its incubation period. The grade four teacher and I were talking and trying to come up with an activity that has something to do with the real life of the kids. My class could do more with their own homes - only two of them don't live out in the country. I figured maybe we could take off on that idea somehow. Plus we are planting potatoes right now connected with our living things topic. I think we can tie that together to get back into real life. I was also thinking of doing something like a shoe box diorama. Maybe the kids could do their own farm yard, using shoe boxes.

They seem to be fascinated with the mini-project on growing plants, too. This is the same kind of fascination that they had with the power tools. We put the sprouting potatoes in little dishes of water and then covered them with black plastic. Today they have roots on them coming out of the water. It was really great! I pulled one out and showed the kids and they could hardly believe it. I had to run over to each one and look at theirs. Devon had nothing growing on his - he must have broken off the stem, so no roots were growing. But that was one that was three inches long, hanging down the side of the potato. You pick it up and it looks like some kind of a monster, with hair! Nathan had the same idea. He came up to me and said, "Can we put eyes on this thing to make it into a monster?" We've had apple seeds growing since September, but they haven't even cracked open or germinated yet. I wanted to show them that things grow from seeds and sometimes from the plant themselves, like a potato or a tree clipping.

But the neighborhood walks are neat, too, and they are also a type of mini-project. The kids saw all kinds of patterns. We had just done a color pattern in the classroom, and they really seem to pick up on patterns. The first one was to just walk around and look at different houses. But the kids were more interested in seeing patterns on the houses than the houses themselves. They talked about the fences, garage doors, house roofs, and windows. Many of the kids were seeing connections between what we were talking about in class and the houses, but there were also a couple of kids that were just along for the hike! So when we went to the construction site, I talked about patterns in the wood, to help them make more connections. But they just wanted to draw power tools! I did think of contacting a fellow who does woodworking in town. He has a shop, and he even said maybe the kids would be interested. But I initially thought, "In my class? No way!"

Last year, I couldn't imagine how I would be able to handle so many activities all going on at once, but now I am doing it rather easily!

March, 1992:

I think I really have learned this year that the classroom isn't the only place for education and that we can go outside these walls into the community. I think that I always knew that, but I just didn't get out and do it. This year, I realized the value of going on ordinary field trips and looking for shapes in the neighborhood. I also found that I can do a lot more systematic instruction when I get the kids engaged with something that allows for more creativity, student input, and decision making.

As far as my home project is going, one little boy brought a "master workshop" to school. It has a drill, saw, screwdriver, and a hammer - four tools in one. We've had that now for two weeks and the kids have got to the point where they aren't interested anymore. One by one, they have gradually had enough and the novelty has worn off. We planned to go out today and got scraps of wood from the lumber yard, but we didn't make it. We'll go on Wednesday and get the wood pieces. They wanted to make sculptures, but it looks like we're not getting any clay this year, so they can make wood sculptures. I'll get them to glue to start with, then maybe do some sawing and use some nails. I have borrowed a carpenter's bench from ECS, and we're just getting started. My kids weren't really interested in the house itself. They were just most interested in the tools, so I had to let them take the project in this direction. They keep asking when we are really going to get into the carpenter stuff. But I want to do some kind of a project on "time" or "change" too, and I'm trying to integrate some math concepts along with it. The motivation is building!

Who knows what we'll do next? The kid who brought the workshop wanted to take it home today. He said he wanted to bring it home so he could bring in his computer tomorrow. Those are the kinds of things that I can't even dream up myself and they really do peak their interest. He's already got it figured out what he's going to bring next! He's the same guy that brought green cookies for St. Patrick's Day.

I know that I've taught some good lessons using the old unit lesson plans, but I think all the hands-on learning is really powerful. I videotaped a discussion about their impressions of projects. They know what they're interested in! I keep thinking, "The kids were the ones that saw the patterns on the fences. I wasn't the one that pointed the patterns out to them. They found them first and showed me." Then I know they've got it!

Summary Thoughts: April, 1992:

It's hard to think about my class now, because I'm so bothered by our labor action! I don't agree with strikes and I voted against this one, but to no avail. I detest the position in which I find myself - withdrawing my services from the kids. I feel like a fifth wheel on a vehicle that has four new tires. Useless!! I hate confrontation to begin with and this is definitely no picnic!

From my experience this year, it seems that it is easier for most people not to change than to change. The energy that I required this year to implement change would be enough to run more than one traditional classroom. At the same time, though, the energy I picked up in the process was more than enough to carry me through.

I have always enjoyed learning new things and have done so on my own initiative usually out of necessity to solve personal uneasiness. I usually learn best by talking and working in a small group which is focused on a task of our own doing. Our small group sessions have been very helpful, as has been my journalling experience.

Overall, my impetus for change has come from a personal desire to do so! I don't change just because the changes are mandated by an external force. True change has to come from within. Perhaps those who want others to change must somehow plant the seed of desire to change before mandating the change.

A deeply felt personal belief is that children need to feel good about themselves as learners. I haven't changed my mind about that since doing project work, but it has become more deeply entrenched. I have seen some exciting changes in my students as I allowed them to make decisions and to take more responsibility for their learning. They have become more on task and they have understood more intensely their own learnings. They often went beyond my expectations. Their excited engagement in tasks would have been impossible to realize in teacher-directed lessons.

I wanted to give my grade six students more ownership last year, but I often felt it was too great a risk. My feelings were seconded by the comments of some of my colleagues. They would warn me about potential discipline problems and curriculum problems. Donna encouraged me to have "the courage to be imperfect," and I do think that I have developed that courage. I have changed, become more courageous and now take more risks. I am more responsive to the needs of individual children and have achieved a balance in type, quality, and quantity of learning activities.

This year has given me the opportunities to learn that professional development does not stop at learning new methods, but goes on to consider new attitudes, ideas, and beliefs. I have transferred my understanding of how I learn to how I need to set up learning activities for my students. I learn best when I want to discover something of personal interest to me when, where and how I want to. Whether one is an adult or a child, motivation for engaging in an activity must come from within to produce results and long term change.

I have changed my methods and skills to come into line with my attitudes and feelings, which are now more internalized, but largely unchanged. Perhaps any success with the Project Approach has to be credited to my initial reasons for attending the workshop in the first place and for getting involved with the research group. I wanted to!

Voices of the Students

In May, 1992, Brad discussed the projects that had been done over the year with his grade one students and asked them to write stories about their favorite activities and why they liked them. Some of these stories are presented below, and contain a great deal of "invented spelling," demonstrating the independence and self-confidence of the children. They also include "adult spelling." Sometimes sight words were written from memory and other times, spellings were requested of the teacher during the story writing, with questions like, "What is the right way to spell "ingredients?" Food seems to have a prominent place in many memories!

We went to see a new homes. i dreus a drill and i drew a saw and a hamr and a rench and we went to Mr. R's we bact coces.

We went to see a school bus and greu the bus. We greu it on the sketch boards. I greu a map of the bus. We went to the shop.

In the school project we went to the school work shop and we drod the stuf that wer in ther. Wen we wer finisht looking at the stuf we went bak and made the stuf. But I made the plagrand and the ecwitmint and the swings and the slids and the sand box and the mongkey bors. I put som gates urownd it. I ges thats all.

We planted peas and we put one in the dark and one with no air, and one with no water and one with everything. I got to wotch the one with no air.

We all made cookies. We even did measuring. We tast thm. They were good. The ingredients were suger and snnmin and btud and flower and milk and solte. I liked it when we wer making cookies.

We went to see a new house. It had a basmint and a garage and bathroom and kichn. Boy work on the house. We had fon. It woz incritobol [incredible]. I liked it. It was nis. I liked the drill.

We invitid are parins to are clasroom. We drak jues and my mom brot two latrs for me.

Four are shop we hect pses of cardbod boxs to gthr and it wis vaire bog. We pot sand in it . I rile lict it. I do not lic to rit.

Brad's Interpretative Reflections: June, 1993

The Post Office Project is a story about an excited teacher and an excited bunch of kids pursuing an activity in which they all have ownership. The Project Approach isn't a "fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants" approach. It does take

some planning and forethought, but the teacher is not alone in this activity. It's a collaborative effort. Students must be actively involved in planning activities to get a sense of ownership and intrinsic excitement! It helped that Peggy and I really enjoyed working together. We really supported each other because we were both trying to do project work.

Real learning was taking place as we tried to come up with a new project after Christmas. Although I was excited, I was somewhat anxious, too. Children can be responsible for their own learning, but it can be scary for a teacher to not be the center of attention. The story of our homes project is really about a teacher learning about teaching and learning. I am glad that I allowed the classroom, inside and outside, to be a place where the children are free to question, to share, and to learn. I'm not sure why I initially said that I wouldn't want woodworking in my classroom. That's a puzzle now.

I have changed more this past year than I did last year. I know that I tried to give the grade one students more choices and ownership of their learning but, this year with the grade three students, it has really happened. Many times my students worked in cooperative learning groups on topics of choice within the curriculum and I have used very few photocopied worksheets.

I have taught to individuals much more than I did last year. I've learned to gear my expectations to the student's abilities and interests. Not every child is expected to do the same amount of work or the same quality of work. I've found my children to be much less stressed and much less frustrated than other students in the school. My children's parents are saying things like, "She sure enjoys being in your class." I'm not sure that they know why - but I think that the students know!

I look forward to teaching in a grade four class next year, especially because I'm going to have all my present grade threes again, plus ten other students. I am excited about planning with them, learning with them, and assessing with them. I am excited about meeting the learner where he or she is, and taking the student as far as he or she can go in a year. I am excited about the change within myself, as well. Teaching grade four will provide a new focus and a new chance to influence change in the system. Another challenge for next year is to improve my methods of evaluation - especially anecdotal record keeping. That's one of my major goals. Knowing most of the kids from my class this year should make assessment easier and more accurate.

My Interpretation

Brad believes that experimentation with the Project Approach helped him to clarify his fundamental beliefs about learning and teaching as he says, "I changed my methods and skills to come into line with my attitudes and feelings." His statement, "The kids are the ones who saw the patterns on the fences," seems to represent the results of his exploration. It demonstrates his focus on active discovery learning, his belief in children as creators of their own knowledge, and his own position in the process. As well, it symbolizes all the meaningful connections made by Brad during the research study and afterwards.

While Brad continues to value "systematic instruction," during the time he allocates for project work he is faithful to the basic principles of the Project Approach, to the structuring of teaching strategies, and to the many suggested hands-on learning activities. He organizes activities to meet the *basic goals of each phase of the project and plans field trips, sketching, painting, drawing, and construction as integral parts of each project. While Brad says that he wants to "break out" of traditional ways of thinking, he still demonstrates his belief in organization and planning, values "well behaved," "quiet and involved" students, and is very conscious of the clock ticking away during the day. He repeatedly, and probably unconsciously, reports the specific amount of time that a particular activity took to complete - thirty minutes on a group activity and ten minutes to clean up. Brad also recognizes his role in the organizational process, when he excitedly states, "I had a brainwave" and reports, "Before we went on the field trip, I organized them so that when they got there each person would have a specific task to do."*

Brad does not give over all the control to his students; however, as he participates actively in joint planning, he gains increasing insight into the importance of listening to the voices of the children through a process of negotiation, and says, "It's not just my project." It is difficult to believe his self-effacing comment on the first night of the group sessions: "I'm not sure about how I'm doing it. It sort of just happened," because he goes on to describe the project, demonstrating his strong organizational leadership and facilitative role as he talks. In fact, by the end of the session he self-confidently states, "It went really, really well," attributing his appropriate choice of a topic as one of the most important reasons for the success of the project.

Brad is reflective about what he does during each phase of the project. He carefully considers the potential effectiveness of two different topic possibilities (Homes or Hospital) and makes a decision based on what he feels will be most beneficial to the children. He decides to do a project on the *"hospital" believing it will provide the best learning opportunities, but is flexible in changing to a "homes" project when the students show excitement about houses after viewing a related film. During the post office project, he says, "I kept worrying about how quickly the days passed by" and "At this point, I thought the project might be actually going okay." Upon completion of the school project, he says, "For some reason I feel a sense of failure," and continues to analyze his perceptions, with such reflections as "I want to be independent (I think)!" These reflections often result in personal insights, as happens when he discovers that he can't "work out someone else's plan."*

Brad decenters himself from the central position as curriculum planner, constantly acknowledging the contributions of the children. Just as he says, "It was the kids who saw the patterns... ," he states: "They had seen and heard things I hadn't noticed," playing down his own role in the learning process. He shows trust in the natural abilities of children to construct their own realities throughout all the projects, but also shows greater awareness of the value of following the child's lead and of providing learning choices as he becomes more committed to what he is doing. He recognizes the individual needs and accomplishments of individual children, and says, "so I had to let them take the project in this direction," "the kids grouped themselves" and, as a final statement,"... but I think the students know!" Brad seems to enjoy recounting stories of student learning experiences. His pleasure in the "mistake" made in copying the postal code and his amazement in Becky's ability to draw the computer from memory are two examples of many such anecdotes. His enthusiasm in the abilities of the students comes across in exclamations, like: "They had lots to say;" "Not one child got bored;" "The kids have given the project a life;" "Then you know they've got it;" "I experienced a warm, fuzzy feeling to have my students this involved in a *project;" and "The intensity was exhilarating." In his final interpretation, Brad refers to "real learning" which seems now to involve an emphasis on "process," as well as "product."*

The underlying theme in Brad's story is, for me, one of "meaningful connections." Just as the children made connections between patterning concepts they were learning during math lessons in the classroom and the patterns they observed on the fences during a neighborhood field trip, Brad was making connections, too. He saw the value of providing experiences to connect in-school and out-of-school learning. He acknowledges the role of collegial connections, some being more effective than others, but all providing him with meaningful learning opportunities. He lauds his positive communications with administrators; finds pleasure in a collegial relationship with a "kindred spirit;" liaises with many other teachers in school, from Peggy, his grade one partner, to the grade four teacher and the shop teacher; provides opportunities for the children to share their accomplishments with their principal, parents, and other teachers; tells stories about effective and humorous interactions with parents; makes deeper personal connections after attending a second Project Approach workshop; and expresses appreciation to his fellow research participants and to me for the connections he feels we have helped him to make. Brad continually recognizes and describes these interpersonal connections as a meaningful part of his exploration.

Brad also makes meaningful connections with the printed word, expressing excitement about what he is reading, as he says, "I wonder why it didn't sink in before." He integrates learning activities and discovers natural connections linking subject activities and goals, as outlined in the curriculum guides. Although he discounts the value of the Project Approach workshop, *he often connects with ideas, hidden in his memory, that were gained there. He says, "Flashback, I remembered Sylvia telling me..." and "the one thing I got out of Sylvia's workshop...." He makes another authentic connection when he says, "I have transferred my understanding of how I learn to how I need to set up learning experiences for my students."*

Brad is presently involved in a teacher evaluation project with his Assistant Superintendent in which they are exploring a collaborative model of supervision. He enthusiastically comments on this year's accomplishments and positively anticipates next year's teaching responsibilities. There are many conditions which may have caused Brad to make meaningful connections during the study, and to sustain and advance his knowledge and expertise during the subsequent year. While he recognizes that his educational philosophy is consistent with that of the Project Approach, he believes that he didn't put it into practice before, because "it was too great a risk." Brad's previous inability to practice what he believes may be related to a fear of nonacceptance and rejection by colleagues. He lacked the courage to risk potential student discipline problems and issues of curriculum coverage that may result from experimentation with new methods; however, he gained courage through his self-investigation with project work. With each success, and the resulting approval from colleagues, administrators, parents, and students, his self-efficacy increases. He says that the Vice Principal's approval was a "shot in the arm." He reports: "The kids went home feeling very important. I left with similar feelings." And Brad expresses self pride in the remark, "I'm doing it so easily now."

Brad's risk-taking is not that of wild abandonment; rather, he takes calculated risks, waiting for the right time, the right place, and the right reason to branch out and try something new. His motivation is intrinsic; he *says he took on a new challenge, because "I wanted to." He recognizes his opportunities, putting time and energy into new experiences, carefully planning for his success, as well as that of his students. He chooses safe places to risk - in his classroom as he draws chalkboard pictures of his house in front of students with whom he had developed a positive relationship, in his journal as he dialogues with a trusted partner, and in his school as he interacts with both positive and critical colleagues, but still within a supportive administrative climate.*

During the year of the research study, Brad constructed new realities as he made meaningful connections to change his practice, but he believes that "it has really happened" this year. While he doesn't attribute his personal change to the Project Approach per se, he does demonstrate an understanding of the importance of student empowerment in rich experiences of meaning making. Brad sees teaching as an important service, and expresses this view in his distaste for the teachers' strike. He felt distraught as he was forced to "withdraw my services from the kids." I suspect that if Brad continues on this journey of reflective inquiry, he will continue to enthusiastically reiterate the same words year after year, "I have changed more this past year than I did last year," because each year will bring new learning and self-discovery Dedicated teachers like Brad can provide the type of leadership that results in dynamic learning for children as they thoughtfully consider the worth of educational innovations and explore these options in their classrooms **with** *the children. "With" is the connection that seems to make it all happen for Brad.*

One Day We Just Went For A Walk

Project Work in Rachael's Grade Two Classroom

October, 1991:

As for me, I'm not doing that great with getting a project going. But, when Ashley talked about the element of "choice," I thought about the stories that we're reading right now. One story was about handicapped kids and "balancing," so I bought in blocks and other shapes and we tried balancing activities. My idea was that they could draw me a picture of what they had balanced, and they would have to count how many they had used and it would be a good math activity. I had other wonderfully creative ideas, but I couldn't get them to do anything. They just said, "I don't want to!" I tried to get them going in different ways, but still nothing worked. I've been wondering why they didn't want to do it. I think it was because it was my choice. When I read back in my journal, it was "**I** want this" and "**I** want that" and "This is what **I** want." And it was all **me** , and nothing was coming from them. I don't think this was a big enough topic to interest them. Their curiosity was satisfied after they balanced three or four things and that was that! After that, it was just a fun type activity - a matter of occupying themselves.

So I said to myself, "Okay, you've learned something here. I think the ideas definitely have to come from the kids." What I have found so far this year is that I have been having trouble adjusting to being back in a school in which my teaching lessons are different than everyone else's. Working within the confines and rules that I'm finding here is relatively frustrating. The principal expects me to fill in the slots on my time table because he wants to know that if he comes in at that time, that's what I'll be doing. So I deliberately set up my time table so language arts was always followed by social studies, because I figured if someone walked in they wouldn't be able to tell which I was doing. It's terrible when you have to try to circumvent the system!

All I want to do is take a small bus trip to fit with a social studies unit, so the kids can find out about recreational facilities in the community. I've been trying to arrange a bus trip, but "field trips" is not an area that the principal has chosen to focus on, and he says that the school isn't allocating money in that way. So I'm trying to think of ways to get around that and still achieve my goals. I have been doing bits and pieces of project-type work, but until I can get some things straightened out with the administration and feel comfortable working in the school, I don't know how far I can go with project work. This is shaping up to be the most frustrating year of my life. I keep thinking, "Maybe I only need to stay until I get my first pay check. Just last until Christmas - then I'll have four paychecks by that time."

I went to the librarian and told her that I wanted all the books about dinosaurs, and she said, "You can't have them all!" Well, I guess it's fine that they restrict how many books you can take out, but we only get to use the library once a week for thirty minutes. I can't even get books myself, because teachers don't know how to use the computer to take books out after school. The school librarian doesn't make us feel too welcome.

Actually, the project work is not coming along at all. The next section in the reader is on "dinosaurs" and I don't mind the stories, so that's why I decided that this is something that maybe we can get going on. It's not exactly what I want to do, but if the kids get really gung-ho, then I'll do it. I thought about what Sylvia said about that topic not being connected to their real life experiences, but I decided that if I can get them excited and inquisitive, then I will do it anyway. So I started a discussion about dinosaurs, to try to find out what the kids knew. Five minutes and the discussion was over! So I said, "Okay fine, pick the next topic." Maybe I'll do a social studies one - my community. But I need to get a bus to go on a field trip. Maybe we can stop at the recycling plant. Something that may be interesting to them, because if you do recycling projects in your room, then you get to keep the school trophy. Maybe that will motivate them. I just don't know anymore!

I guess I can summarize my lack of success with project work, as follows:

* It's hard work.
* I'm faced with a fragmented timetable.
* I need to work on group skills with my class.
* How far can I push them?
* Resources are extremely poor.
* Even in grade two, they have already become used to doing everything together and all achieving the same goal.

* I need to examine what specific behaviors I will not tolerate.
* I need to establish a more concrete road map so I can determine the speed at which I can reasonably progress.
* The lack of supportive colleagues may be the key to my discontent.
* I hate wandering in the wilderness - even though I know that I will find a map soon.

All I seem to be doing is finding out how theory and practice don't match and how realities can destroy your plans. Even though I know that "life's just like that," I feel like I walk a fine line. I am a teacher in the classroom, but I also am very conscious of viewing my world from the perspective of an outsider - that of a researcher who is anxious to see how theory and practice can mesh, to see why things are done the way that they are, and to assess how things can be improved. Because of this, I need to be more aware that others view me as other than a teacher. My peers wonder what tidbit of knowledge that I may volunteer, and whether or not they really wanted to know it! I wonder if I can fit in with the staff this year.

But then, when I'm grasping at straws, I try to think, "I will be successful." There is probably a lot more things that are project-related than I'm doing that I'm really not aware of doing, because they are things that I do all the time. I know that I'm open to the kid's learning. I am willing to stop and drop what we were doing if something better comes along. I keep thinking about the project that we did on the "university community" when I took the course on the Project Approach. I really didn't enjoy it, because that was the topic we had to do and I didn't find it interesting. I don't want to do that to my kids.

The teachers in our school are trying to come up with a school motto, and one of the submissions is: "Children come first." I'm having a hard time accepting this as a motto. I do believe that children must be our priority, but I don't think that their "needs" should control me. I know this sounds terribly selfish but, unless I meet my own needs, I can not be a successful teacher - can I? I keep asking myself, "Would I like to have me as a teacher?" The answer is mostly, "Yes," but when I answer, "No," then I worry.

Some days I feel like last year was a dream, that university was not "real," that all I accomplished was for nothing, that I won't last until Christmas. But I have other days when I am able to stop, watch, and listen to what my students are trying to tell me. I feel like they are eager to learn, that it is worth it, that I am good at what I do, that my changes will result in good things happening for them. My life is like a roller coaster. Please be patient with my screams of despair and giggles of delight (not that I did much giggling this week). I still think that this ride will be worth it!

November, 1991:

I am definitely on a major roller coaster ride! We did start on our project. One day we just went for a walk! It was a lovely day - hoar frost all over the place. We took our clipboards and trotted off to see what we could see. Well, we didn't get more than a block in an hour and a half! We are doing a project on the community - our community neighborhood. Before we left, we talked about what things we might see, and someone said, "Snow!" Another thought we'd see cars. One said, "Sewers," but I said that I didn't think we'd see any sewers. But if we did, I told him to count them and keep track. We must have seen fifteen sewer-related things! It was cold so that steam was coming out of these little holes and the kids chipped away until they found a manhole cover. Obviously, they knew more than I did on this matter!

Finally, I feel like I am doing what I feel is good teaching. That was a wonderful day. I left the school with a smile on my face and this has been a rare occurrence this fall! I have finally struck upon a topic of interest to my students. And Dr. Chard was right. She said that we needed to start small, to lower our expectations, to go on a walk! Everything clicked that day - philosophy and practice. It was definitely a turning point.

Today, we went out for another walk, because we wanted to draw maps later and no one had written down names of the streets. This time we made a large list, looked through a lot of pictures, and talked about where we lived. So that was our "Memory Phase." They had taken some community in grade one, so they knew that a community is a place where people live, work, play, and go to school. That was the kind of information that I got from them. They got interested in other things, like the sewers and signs. The park bench had advertisements on it. They found flyers in the alley, which gave us clues of where people worked. They found out that the big building on the corner is a treatment center and knew someone must work there. A car with a dealership sign and a roofing truck were parked on the street. They saw someone putting up Christmas lights. The grader had just been through and someone twigged that someone worked on it - a street cleaner. I was really excited, because we wouldn't have thought of those workers in the community, if we hadn't gone on the walk.

The hoar frost was gorgeous and we made so many drawings. I never realized all the kinds of patterns that it made. It was so neat. We'd be walking along and then, all of a sudden, eighteen kids would plop down and start drawing pictures. The wind had created waves against a building and they must have made six dozen drawings of it. We also took a little detour through a back alley and found many people have "Blue Boxes," but none of them were being used and most of them were filled with snow. Others had junk in them. Because they saw all those flyers in the alley, they were especially environmentally consciousness.

When we got back we made a sequence chart of what we had seen and done. The kids formed groups based on interest. And I was surprised that there was a real mixing of abilities in each one. We took our two special needs children with us, too and they fit in just wonderfully. These are the groups that developed - sewers, snow, environment, occupations, signs - and, of all things, garage doors! They were really fascinated with the kinds of garage doors that they saw in the neighborhood. They are busy compiling the information from the walks on large pieces of chart paper. They are reproducing their sketches and finding ways to organize them. Many started using labels and sentences and the rest soon caught on. I spent a great deal of time watching to see who was taking the leadership roles and to better understand the social interactions in the class. I was pleased with the easy acceptance of the English Second Language students, as well as the learning disabled students, in the groups. I was also able to see use of sentences, categorization, science concepts, knowledge of directions, and use of descriptive language. I'm feeling so much more in sync with what I'm doing.

Now we're working on directions because I want them to do some map work, and trace our exact route. We have one group who are waiting for the arrival of a mother on Friday and they're going back out then to investigate garage doors some more. Another group will go with a mother next week to check out the facilities to promote environmental awareness. They're doing some reading now. And my sewer group has to do more work, too. They need to find out if what they saw are sewer holes or just drain holes. I have no idea, so I'm hoping to get a resource person in to talk about it. There's another group that may splinter off. There's a big housing development in the area with a lot of machinery and some kids really like the big machinery. A couple kids brought their own clipboards and they want to go there to draw. They're going to bring in some cartons and I have a solid box, so we will be making a model of the community.

I noticed them in the playground today. They were saying, "I'm facing north. I want to take five steps left. And then I'll be facing west." So they really got into directions. Things are developing so naturally. We ran across four or five postal stations and now we're calculating how many people are in the neighborhood. And one little guy actually keep track of how many houses that we went by. He only counted the houses on the left side of the street, because he figured that he could double it to find out how many in all. There should be the same number on each side of the street, so it makes sense! I have moms who are willing to come in just for an hour or so and take the kids back out to find out specific things that they want to know more about. Even though our library is poor, I did find some information on the environment. Nothing on sewers!

I think that, before I tried to do too much, as opposed to something that could be easily done. And I had my agenda of what I thought they would be interested in doing, and it was more complicated than it needed to be. All I kept thinking was, "How can the community meet my needs?" It was too big a question. Now I think we will be able to answer that question by looking at all the little things that they are really interested in investigating. Another issue was finding a block of time in which I felt comfortable doing it. And also explaining to the principal where I was going and what I was doing. He said, "Where are you going? What are you going to see? Why are you going?" And I couldn't answer all those questions before I went! I just thought, "I'll start small and see what happens." Now we'll probably work on the project about three times a week.

My principal invited me to go to a Program Continuity workshop with him. I told him what I was doing, and he liked my ideas! He told me that he is anxious to see how the project progresses. When I went home, I felt like my feet never touched the ground. I feel like I can make a difference. I can influence the school in ways that will improve the ways we teach children.

As I re-read my journal from September and October, it seems that I allowed the more negative aspects and facets of my teaching career to overshadow the positive events that happen everyday in the classroom. My voice itself seemed tired and discouraged. I began to wonder if an outside listener would conclude that the speaker was in the wrong occupation. But now, as I feel success, the children in my class have, once again, become my focal point.

January, 1992:

We're finally wrapping up the neighborhood project. December was a wipe out! We did things, but not much - just fifteen minutes here and there. For Phase III, we are constructing a mural and doing posters to summarize what we're done. The first thing the children decided to do was to conduct a survey themselves. We made a list of questions we wanted to ask - How many in your family? What kind of a house do you live in? What newspaper do your parents read? What recreational areas do you use? Is there a hospital or a fire station in your neighborhood? I typed them up and the children took them home and had their parents help them fill them out. Now we're in the process of compiling that information, using their notes. They compile the information in groups and decide who is going to do what. They graphed some of the information, like about the houses and newspapers.

I think the principal will be glad when we finish the mural. It's almost the length of my room stretched on double-sized paper. There's paint scattered all over and paint brushes everywhere. The area for the map is where we walk the most and they have painted in the major things there. They decided what they wanted to include - the school and the road beside it; the big crescent where Mrs. Brown, one of our teachers lives; a little strip mall. I drew the major streets and they added in any ones they wanted.

I had kids sign up for painting. Everyone was entitled to paint for about fifteen minutes or to paint two pictures - whichever came first. And we rotated through the list throughout the day. We had to stop half way because we were getting too many houses, so we made a list of other things that we saw that should be painted on our mural - signs, churches, fences. One little guy, from the learning assistance room, is in charge of painting the cars, and he's painting some pretty wild ones! It's proving to be a bigger endeavor than I thought it would be - almost a mini-project of its own. And I'm at the point where I really want to move into something else, but they're still asking me when we get to go on another walk. This was something I wasn't planning on continuing, but I think I may tie it into science now.

I realized the other night that I'm really doing another project - a mini-project on "Time." We are expected to teach time to the hour, half hour, and quarter hour in grade two. I made a couple of, what I call, center activities. They made clocks and I brought an egg timer and a couple of stop watches and just left them out. Now we are timing everything under the sun - and recording it. We're placing estimates on how long it will take to go places, on how fast something runs, or how many swings it will take. I brought in an old alarm clock and now they brought in clocks too and we have them stationed all around the room.

I sent home a homework project about what they did with their time when they left school. It was really interesting to compare the different life styles and different extra-curricular activities - and who goes to bed when!

They are getting good at estimating time and are getting interested in the passage of time. So now we have posted in more areas more timetables on when we go where. I was late getting back to class yesterday because I was talking to the principal and David met me at the door, tapping his watch and said, "We returned at 9:38 and now its 9:42. Where were you? You are six minutes late!" They are so much more aware of time in general. And now it's developing into a measurement topic, too. We're measuring and calculating how long it takes snow to melt - that's really science. It may develop into another project of its own. I'm fascinated with what they're bringing in from home. Basically half my room is totally focused on time. And I see them using this knowledge during the rest of the day. So I think it has peaked. It started out being a skills activity, but we did talk about what they know about time. It was very limited. So by doing Phase I, I found out a lot more about where to start with them and where to go, which also ties in with my current focus on evaluation.

But as they were talking about different types of clocks, we thought of having a clock maker come in to the class. We do have one who lives fairly close to the school. We also talked about how we grow and change over time. This kind of gets into the health program. It's kind of an insidious thing -

sort of creeping up on you. I love it! One day a child said that he thought the day was going by so fast. "We've been here fifty-nine minutes!" or "We did that work for one hour and thirty-five minutes." or "I think it should be recess now." It's their concept and they are beginning to naturally use these terms.

I talked to the grade four teacher who said she has some students who don't know how to tell time to the quarter hour. I had them make some rummy games for my kids. It served a double purpose. The grade four's think they are helping out the grade two's and the grade two's think it's really neat to play games with the big kids. This is good for Program Continuity. And it just happened to be that I walked in when they were working on time. I asked them if they could make up games for my kids because I didn't have enough time, so they made the games and labelled them.

I find their concept of aging really interesting. We're talking about how we age and grow and I wanted to focus on how our abilities change - that we are able to do more things as we get older. They knew what babies could do and what they could do as seven or eight year olds. Some even knew that when they got to be eighteen, they could drive a car. But when I asked them about what they could do when they were fifty that they couldn't do when they were eighteen, they said things like cooking, having babies, getting a job. One girl said, "What can you do when you're seventy?" and someone else said, "Everyone's dead when they get to be seventy." I told them my parents were still alive and they were more than seventy. In fact, now they are in Mexico. One little boy said, "Aren't you worried. They are awfully old. They could go just like that!" They basically think old age is about fifty, and not many kids have grandparents around. Old age is having grey hair! I found it interesting that they didn't have as good a concept of aging as I thought they would have.

I think you shouldn't stop the project before they are finished. For me, it's having to be patient and saying, "OK, they're not done. Does it really matter in the major scheme of things? Another week or two isn't going to make a difference." And sometimes I found that when I've just waited, new things come out. They kind of change focus a little bit and kind of get renewed interest. But, if it starts to drag early on, then I have to inject some new twist.

February, 1992:

As for my clock project, it just kind of fizzled out. Their interest peaked and then it just ended. I brought in a couple more clocks of my own and put them around the room. I did find them consulting them and figuring out how long it takes to do different things. I also think they were practicing their clock skills and every once in a while they still talk about the passage of time, so it might surface again. I'll kind of let it germinate and if it comes up again, then we'll do some more. I never did get the clock maker to come in.

Now we're finally finishing our big community mural - after a month and a half of it sitting on my floor with paint all over the place. We finally got it up and now the kids are working on the final charts that say exactly what we learned. We need to compare our community to a fishing or lumbering village because that's part of the social studies curriculum. I'm hoping to borrow some sand tables. I want to see what would happen if they construct a village or how they would decide to set up a city. We've seen quite a few films now. We have to get into the social studies business on communities - on different ways that communities meet people's needs in different ways. The fishing village has different industries and employment. We studied how our community meets our needs and now we need to look at others and get across the idea of interdependence. We're going to compare a small city, like ours, with a big city, like Vancouver. Quite a few kids have been to Vancouver, and there are quite a few resources around. We'll look at maps and practice mapping skills - maybe construct a delta in the sand table.

The kids are bringing in lots of things from home, too. They share experiences they've had in these other communities. That makes it more real for them, too. For example, we constructed our own community. Well, if we were to construct a sea port in Vancouver, we could see how different the communities really are and how different the transportation is. I'm really trying to emphasize the construction this year.

I think I'll be able to go back and see how all the subjects relate to this topic. I feel it is important that the kids have a little more knowledge about Canada, because I often wonder what they really know about the country in which they live. So now we are doing a lot on provinces, and the flags and mapping skills. And that's kind of a throw back to when we went on our neighborhood walk and talked about which direction we were going. They are very conscious now of the map and the scale of the map. Some of them were amazed that the distance of my baby finger is about one hundred kilometers on one map, but that the same baby finger fits about five hundred kilometers on another map. They are getting the idea that all maps are different and have different representations.

We are also doing a project on bears - real bears! We were talking about bears in a story we were reading and I thought it might be neat to talk about the difference between fact and fiction. And it sort of took off. Now we've been researching bears for quite a long time and they have really good ideas for things they want to do. So it has turned into a project. I don't think Sylvia would consider it a good topic for a project because it doesn't deal with the reality of the children's everyday life. But I think it's okay. Most of the kids have seen bears at the zoo and now we're talking about whether or not it's good to lock up animals in a zoo.

In this project we haven't touched on anything that isn't real. We haven't done teddy bears or care bears. Their projects of choice have to be based on real bears. We made charts, from brainstorming all the things that they knew about bears. We sat in a circle on the rug and I gave each child a slip of paper and had them write down a fact they knew about bears. Then we tried to fit them together under common headings. So we had this big webbing chart. We have rearranged them quite a few times. Now they're posted. Some of the facts were not quite right, and as we discovered this, then we corrected them. It's been a great learning experience. Then I had them take a group of facts and write paragraphs. I discovered that it's the little things that they like to know. They work in groups of three most of the time. They are making quite sizeable reports. We have also learned a lot about how to use reference books. There has also been great language development. I also have used lots of other sources of literature. I don't think it's bad to use fantasy literature to go with this topic. The kids learn to separate reality from fiction. And fairy tales are fun!

I think I am going with what the children want to learn. If these kids want to learn about bears and can learn about the survival of the fittest and want to learn why the sun bear has less of a coat than the black bear, I think that's great. We talked about camouflaging and how much they actually eat and so many other things. To me, that's a valid thing to be learning and I think it applies to a lot of other things. I'm more interested in them learning global facts and in the process of learning. I think it's neat that they like to know that some eat meat and some don't. Some of the kids are quite proficient at using words like "carnivore," "herbivore," and "omnivore" in their day-to-day vocabulary. We also did a lot of comparing with weights and measures to estimate how far bears might swim and things like that. Do you know, a polar bear can swim up to eighty kilometers without stopping? I don't care if it's not a legitimate Project Approach topic, and I'm not demanding that the kids recite me all the facts about bears.

March, 1992:

I'm still working on the community project and have been ever since February. To be perfectly honest, I'm no further ahead than we were then. I'm like a plant that sometimes doesn't grow so fast - frost holds it back. Number one, I had all those standardized tests that I had to give. Number two, lack of resources. Number three, I had other things that I felt were more important to do. This is reality! The best advice that I could give someone trying to do projects is to look at the curriculums for social studies and science and to pull the topics from there. I've been re-reading the book on the Project Approach and it does talk about using some secondary resources. That's a valid thing to do, even though primary resources are promoted more in the workshop. I have to fit in with the reality of what my school expects me to do.

In this project, we're comparing three communities. I wanted the kids to investigate different types of jobs in those communities, but I wanted to do it in a more experiential way. I was wracking my brain trying to think of a fisherman that I knew. But, as I know, it has to be something that's of interest for them; however, the reality is that it has to have some interest and meaning for me too! Otherwise we are not going to get anything done. So I guess I'm working on a more democratic system in my classroom. If this is **our** classroom, then I also have to have a voice. But I need to hear their voices, too. And they often tell me that they're not interested in the occupations that I thought it would be interesting to study.

What I thought we were going to look at was the different types of communities and their different resources that create different jobs. But I can see us studying different occupations and why people choose different occupations. The kids are also very interested in environmental concerns, so they might talk about those issues in a lumbering community as opposed to in a farming community.

There's a lot of construction going on. We borrowed a sand table. I guess we're really in Phase I. We're talking about farm communities now and I'm able to bring interesting stuff from home. It has personal meaning to me, so then I think it has personal meaning to them.

Summary Thoughts: April, 1992:

I feel that children need to have an active role in their own learning. They need a variety of experiences and need to manipulate these materials as they work in social situations. In the beginning I puzzled over ways that I could provide children with a classroom that would meet these needs. I wondered how I could provide a multitude of experiences to allow for active participation in their own learning. I knew the project approach would meet these needs, but the hard part for me was to relinquish some of the control that I felt I needed to have to survive. Both teachers and students need to have safe and secure places in which to learn.

I really thought that my initial expectations for my classroom changes were realistic and I had great plans. Reality was very different and I tried to tell myself to be adaptable and to go with the flow. I'm not willing to do that now. I am more committed to making changes in my evaluation and planning methods. I won't accept what has been. I needed to change in order to meet the challenge of using new teaching methods and reporting practices.

I examined my practices carefully, drawing from knowledge acquired during my sabbatical. My exploration and discoveries were shared with colleagues, a community of learners that all were excited about the opportunity to explore interests and to obtain answers to questions that arose in everyday teaching. Certain knowledge was non negotiable, as we explored within the parameters of project work. I think that we all gained proficiency, but the manner in which it was acquired varied as did our learning styles and interests. My focus remained upon the needs of the children.

Change is an evolutionary process. I look at how I have evolved over this year and I realize that erosion takes a long time, but it's amazing what a constant "drip" will accomplish. Yet, a drip can be so aggravating when it won't stop. Finally, you have to get out of bed and do something about it!!

I have never found it easy to make changes. I like the security that is provided by that which is familiar. Yet, the past eight months have seen me making many changes - in what I do, what I think, and how I view others around me. While my initial attempts at doing project work were riddled with difficulties, I eventually experienced success. But it was when I was the most discouraged and frustrated that I learned these important lessons about teaching and myself: 1) I may not be able to change my circumstances but I can change how I react to them; 2) I am not alone as I try to make these changes and, if I stop to take a breath, I will be able to hear the screams of those around me; 3) I need to listen to what I tell myself because I am not doing as bad as I may first perceive; 4) Everyone needs to know that someone is listening to them and will come to their assistance if necessary. I want to continue to explore, reflect, communicate, dream and celebrate the learning that goes on in my classroom.

Voices of the Students

Rachael's grade two students kept a daily journal and she passed on to me some comments made by the children as they thought about regular project work activities. Rachael has rewritten these journal entries, using adult spelling. They represent a child's view of different aspects of project work.

When we went for our walk I liked it when we saw the spider web covered with frost in the alley. I also liked it when we saw neat designs on the snow, but sometimes it was a little cold. I didn't like the garbage spread all over the back alley but we picked it up.

When are we going on a walk again?

What I like about everything was we did the mural and I got to paint three times.

We talked together when we were painting the mural. We talked about who is going to do what. Some people painted cars, some houses, some streets, some signs, some school and school's playground, some school buses, some signals. I felt happy going for walks and painting.

I love how this room is right now. We could move so that beside Adam's desk can be Jena's desk and then I can sit beside Ryan's desk.

You could put us in circles or in groups. But could I be near the front now?

Rachael's Interpretative Reflections: June, 1993

As I read over the beginning of my story, I thought, "What a negative person! How could I have said that?" In the beginning, I seemed to blame everything and everybody else, for my lack of success with project work. I wasn't willing to take any responsibility myself for making it work for me. I wanted to do things now! I had ideas in my head of how it should work, but that seldom does come to pass! I kept hearing little voices telling me, "This isn't right - try something else." I would have preferred someone telling me what to do - but others thought I was silly. I feel again the panic I felt at this point. Confidence is easy to erode. At this point, I really needed support! It's so hard to try new things again and again because - what if I'm wrong!

Later on, I realized that I needed to relax and let things evolve. I knew that I was on the right track, but now I can see so many other areas we could have focussed on. I found the same project evolved very differently this year with different kids. I think that I need to "follow the leader," but to remember that the leader is not necessarily me! In January, everything seemed to come together. I was very pleased with the progression of activities and felt that I could easily justify myself. I realized that I needed to keep my scheduling more flexible and my plans and proposals open to revision - yet I think the outer structure must remain stable as we are ultimately accountable. I don't think it ever gets much better than my "time" project! During the community project, I had to make compromises. I sometimes engineered experiences, but this is a necessity at times. Projects do take a long time to work through and sometimes they seem unending. I used a lot of rationalization for the bear project, but I still think it was a legitimate one. (Why do we always need to rationalize everything!) This project was great for both the kids and me! I was doing what I knew was right and they were learning so much. It's very important for me to be right - and I was. I did it my way and it was wonderful!

I think that I'm choosing my priorities better this year - both in and out of school. In school, I keep to myself more and try not to let it all get me down. My parents have been ill lately, and I've tried to drop everything to be with them when they need me. I decided to take on a lesser role on the convention planning committee, to allow more time for other things. I want to do things with my students that really matter.

My principal was much more lenient this past year with my timetable. He allowed me to schedule large blocks of time for integrated activities, but he still wanted to know how many minutes I had taken from each subject area to arrive at the extra time! I called this time "centers" and he seems to understand that term! But, I don't really schedule specific time for project work, I just incorporate it into other areas of study and do these things during "center time." As well, I did get more of the tables that I requested. I only have four desks, and all the rest of my kids sit around tables. I'm still scrounging for more next year!

I use bits and pieces of the Project Approach. I guess these have just become part of how I look at teaching new things. I usually do Phase I activities with every new "project." I think it's so important to get information about their existing knowledge before you begin. So, I ask them to write down everything they know about whatever we're going to investigate, and then what they think they need to know. The kids have really bought into that approach and it's really successful. Also, we do a good job of celebrating their learning - Phase III. They celebrate what they do, show, and share - even work that is "in progress."

But, the part I'm not as good at is Phase II. I still have trouble with how to have the children do research and investigations individually or in small groups, working with a wide variety of ideas at a wide variety of levels. I tend to organize their learning activities and they are more class oriented. I usually select topics from language arts or the social and science areas, and then work in math activities, trying to integrate skills the best I can. The best project (that is, the one most closely aligned with the way that the Project Approach is supposed to be done) that I did this year was one on "butterflies." It was amazing! They even got into things like finding out where the Monarch Butterfly originally came from. It's from Brazil, you know.

This past year, the special education teacher has come into my room, with my special needs kids, to work on their language arts program in their regular classroom. They haven't been integrated into my program activities yet, but this is a first step. I'm curious about the Marie Clay program on "Reading Recovery." Maybe that will help us plan a more coordinated program next year.

I'm continuing with university courses in my Masters program. I'm taking a six credit summer course, called "Collaborative Communities." This focus may help me to organize a more cooperative classroom, and also to make some progress toward more cooperation between teachers in the school.

I'm carrying the ideas on into a project during the next school year, and I think that will be exciting. I'll still be teaching grade two in this school.

I've been thinking more about the "roller coaster ride;" I'm still on it and it's still kind of scary. However, I've decided that I really don't want to ride on the merry-go-round and just keep going round and round the same old topics and issues. I need new teaching challenges to learn and grow. Even though I dread it, I like the thrill of the swoop down, knowing that it will eventually climb to the top once again, and I will experience increased exhilaration. I'll probably continue to choose to ride on the roller coaster instead of the merry-go-round. That's just who I am!

My Interpretation

As the story begins, Rachael is experiencing a real sense of failure which she portrays as "wandering in the wilderness." In October she reports that she is "not doing that great" and has twice failed in her attempts at project work, once with a topic on "Balancing," and again as she tried to do a project on "Dinosaurs." While she begins by telling the group that she is trying to use "bits and pieces" of the Project Approach, she concludes by lamenting that project work is "not coming along at all." However, in November she reports her success with project work to her research colleagues, as she says, "One day we just went for a walk" and "everything clicked." Rachael acknowledges that "Dr. Chard was right," and attributes her success to starting with a simple concept, as opposed to a complex one. This anecdote represents a "turning point" for Rachael, and I would also suggest that she finds a temporary sense of equilibrium from this success.

I see a theme of polarities in Rachael's story, as she searches for balance between contradictory tensions. She strives to develop pedagogical effectiveness, but is caught between experiences of failure and success and struggles with simple and complex topics. Cortazzi (1991) believes that teachers are constantly dealing with opposite aspects of the problematic situations of classroom life. He says: "Teachers operate on a continuum, oscillating between the tensions of two poles according to the situation, never able to commit completely to only one of them" (p. 126). At one end of the continuum Rachael expresses the joys of personal success, while on the other end she deals with the frustration of perceived failure, never consistently self-satisfied or self-destructive. Even after her initial success with project work, she reports unsuccessful times when she is unable to carry out the project as she would like to - during pre-Christmas time and in a time when testing took priority. Another example of this tension is found in the way in which she vacillates between a belief in simplistic projects and adherence to complex ones. Her "small" topic beginning develops into a very complex project, as she integrates many curriculum areas, as well as aspects of evaluation and some principles of Program Continuity. Thus, as Rachael says, she feels like she is on a "roller coaster" and certainly does experience many "ups and downs" as the year progresses. Perhaps it is her searching for balance between these polarities that results in her effectiveness. If this is the case, the process of searching is as effective to professional learning as are the satisfactory products which emerge from this struggle.

Teaching, for Rachael, is an affective experience - one in which she experiences emotional highs and lows. At some points she is excited and enthusiastic, expressing "giggles of delight;" at other times she is frustrated and despondent, expressing "screams of despair." On one occasion, she says, *"I'm good at what I do," while on another, she says, "This is shaping up to be the most frustrating year of my life." Sometimes she relates amusing anecdotes, like the one about the child who warned her about her parent's imminent death; sometimes she criticizes the school environment, as she does when she deplores the lack of library books. Rachael provides us with both emotional extremes in her narrative incidences, but never with apathetic stories! As she strives to develop the patience to handle her intense emotional reactions, she recognizes that she can not passively sit back and "adapt;" Rachael needs to represent her feelings in authentic ways and one of these ways is through emotional expression.*

A prevalent theme in Rachael's story is the relationship between idealism and realism. She says, "Last year was like a dream," and reports that she loved her sabbatical experiences dealing with abstract theories at the university. In reality, she found that often "theory and practice don't match" and says that "realities can destroy your plans." This conflict was a fundamental dilemma for her throughout the year, and may be a common problem for all teachers who interrupt their teaching with formal education. She understands the rationale behind the Project Approach and believes in its underlying philosophy, but also feels directly accountable for ensuring that the curriculum goals in the Program of Studies are addressed. She struggles with how both goals can be met and wonders if a compromise is even possible. Rachael eventually does arrive at a possible solution to this problem, as she says she would advise teachers to select broad topics from the social studies and science curriculums. She continues to struggle with controversial classroom issues, as her final interpretation suggests. She continues to explore better ways of integrating subject areas within the curriculum, as well as children with special needs into the regular classroom.

In striving to find balance between idealism and realism, Rachael both struggles with the constraints and extols the possibilities. She lists ten constraints that she feels are the causes of her initial lack of success with project work, and elaborates by describing timetable restrictions, lack of administrative support, and inadequate resources in the school. However, she also finds creative ways to solve the problems by exploring unique possibilities. She "circumvents the system" to create a workable timetable; relates a story about the time she and her principal attended a workshop and found some common ground; manages to access a variety of community, parent, and personal resources; and finds needed collaboration opportunities through effective relationships with supportive colleagues. In the past year, Rachael made progress in moving toward her principal's ideas about timetabling. She continues to pursue post-secondary learning, and is finding additional ways to integrate theory and practice in a school project .

One way in which Rachael seems to deal productively with this struggle between negative and positive conditions is by effective self-talk. She tells herself, "Okay, you've learned something," and relates that "When I'm grasping at straws, I try to think." Another way that she deals with her feelings is through interpersonal communications. A third way in which she handles the tension is through action - she is determined and persistent, and works through her problems through a combination of introspective reflection and interpersonal dialogue. Although the project on bears may not be one that meets the theoretical criteria for an effective topic, she justifies her pragmatic use of the topic most effectively.

Another topic of major conflict for Rachael involves developing appropriate structure in her program. She finds herself caught between her belief in "student-centered" programs and her attitudes toward "teacher-

centered" programs. Early in the study, Rachael discovers that she has been unsuccessful because she was focusing on what "I want," and not enough on what the children want and need. On the one hand, she says she wants to "go with what the children want to learn" and "I want to see what would happen if...;" on the other hand, she says "I can also have a voice" and "Their needs shouldn't control me." She is pleased with the unique topics selected by the children (sewers, garage doors, etc.), but also appreciates the required academic skills that she observes (use of sentences, categorization, science concepts, directionality, etc.). She recognizes that "children have to have an active role" in their own learning, but is not secure with the methods which allow this to occur. In searching for a balance between a teacher dominated classroom and one in which the student have total control she desires a "democratic system," in which the classroom is jointly owned - "our classroom." Rachael continues to discover alternate ways of using project work to meet both the needs of the children and of the curriculum.

Rachael also experiences conflict between teacher planning and spontaneous learning as she struggles with the different types of structure Planning is part of who she is and it is obvious in what she does. She makes sequential lists and organizes projects to address goals in language arts, science, health, math, and social studies; she tells us that in grade two she is "expected to teach time;" she prepares a parent survey and organizes the children to compile the information; she organizes her thoughts by numbering the points she is making as she talks. However, in contrast to this type of rational thinking, Rachael demonstrates a great deal of intuitive or creative thinking. She is flexible and takes advantage of spontaneous learning opportunities when she appreciates how "eighteen children would plop down and start drawing pictures" outside in the snow. She also *acknowledges that one project "sort of took off," while another one "just kind of fizzled out," but "might surface again." She uses creative and colorful metaphors to make sense of the natural world and to express her feelings and ideas. She does not see her plans as recipes, but as "ideas of what I might do today;" but it is clear that she begins with lesson plans and specific goals. The Phase II mural is a good example of the results of this dichotomy between teacher planning and student spontaneity. She plans the mural, providing the guidelines, but then allows the children complete freedom in drawing all the pictures. During the "bear" project, she recognizes that "the children have very good ideas for what they want to do," but she also sequentially structures a categorization lesson to help the children with their research. While Rachael appears to find the balance during these particular activities, she is constantly aware of the tension between rational teacher organization and spontaneous flexibility in whatever she does.*

There is also tension between Rachael's need to belong and her need for independent action. She wonders if she will "fit in" with her colleagues and worries that "my teaching lessons are different from everyone else's." She wants approval from her principal, and is also aware of students' acceptance of her, as she says, "I just can't do that to them," and wonders, "Would I like me for a teacher?" On the other hand, she desperately desires to make pedagogical changes based on her new ideas. While she considers "going with the flow," she ultimately decides that she "won't accept what has been." She says of the bear project, "I did it my way and it was wonderful." However, she reveals her continuing struggle with this tension as she says, "I keep to myself more and try not to let it all get me down." She is also sensitive to this dilemma with her students, as she discusses the problems of children who independently come and go from her room to a resource room;

however, Rachael believes that a "mixing of abilities" can result in meaningful learning opportunities when children with special needs are accepted and feel that they belong to the group.

Rachael's concluding thoughts contain insights that may help her to deal with educational change in the future. She acknowledges that she has "never found it easy to make changes," but also realizes that she learns "important lessons" about herself and teaching during her times of greatest frustration. I think Rachael's story is a narrative of many successes, not only in effective exploration with the Project Approach, but in her increased awareness of her own personal competence.

I believe that Rachael is the type of teacher who will always find joy in "going for a walk" and in sharing student discoveries with others. I think a person who enthusiastically interrupts her own story with the exclamation, "Do you know, a polar bear can swim up to eighty kilometers without stopping," or "Monarch butterflies come from Brazil," is one whose excitement in her own learning, and in that of the students, will sustain her through many educational changes. I predict that Rachael will continue to find professional learning opportunities worthwhile, as she constructs personal meaning from her interactions with new information and new interpersonal relationships, seldom remaining in a static position. She constantly struggles to find balance between the various polarities she experiences. She will constantly adjust her place on the continuum, moving back and forth, dealing with the resulting tensions, and finding only temporary respite before she feels a need to make changes that will allow her more effectively to create new realities based on different educational conditions within a changing society.

I Seem To Be Spinning My Wheels

Project Work in Marie's Grade Four Classroom

October, 1991:

I can't believe that it's already October. I had such big dreams, but time's slipping away. My main problem is a segmented time table and a split focus between grade four and special education. First, in September, I spent a lot of time setting up dinosaur centers related to grade four social studies and language arts, but I was really disappointed with the results. I also had Halloween materials for the school theme all over the room and it was all so overwhelming, almost awful! As well, I started portfolios, a home reading program, and I'm trying to do more cooperative learning activities.

My special education workload is tremendous. I don't believe in having many different levels of students in one grade, and I'm not committed to the idea of a special education teacher going into the regular classroom. In that case, how in the world can you individualize unless you give them a worksheet? In some cases, the child never benefits from the individual help, or maybe you're just distracting the rest of the group - and I don't like whispering. I'm an expressive teacher and I like to have some excitement and rip to my teaching. If there are two teachers in conflict, it doesn't help matters - you're just distracting other students.

I'm trying to pull out the resource room kids for fifteen or twenty minutes each time I see them and am trying to do both reading and writing with them during these times. I think that I can handle this better than trying to work in the room with the teacher. I think what's best for the child should be considered and that's the bottom line. But, I think it's important that I go into the classrooms at least once a week so that I know what they're doing and to find out how this child compares to other children in the classroom. I don't think I should be offering a completely different program. My main problem is that I can't keep up with everything that I've got going. As well, I have parents coming in all the time for my resource room students and I don't have enough learning materials for the resource room. I seem to be spinning my wheels all the time. I'm just too busy with it all.

I have no idea how you're supposed to hit everyone's interests in project work. One kid may be interested in birds, and another in pets, and another in dinosaurs. I got a book on research skills for primary grades and it does provide ideas for topics and activities, but I only have so many hours in the day to plan. I wonder if I should pull the class together to do projects, and if we should share the information from the group work. I believe kids need choices, but I really wonder how much choice teachers really have when we are expected to cover the curriculum.

I feel that I'm not doing the Project Approach the right way. I started the project work with a social studies topic, "People in Alberta." I didn't do memories in Phase I, but I did begin by breaking them into groups and giving them a chance to write up questions of things that they would like to know about pioneers. Now, I need to get them working on the research skills that are required in the curriculum. But the librarian in our school doesn't help with library skills and there are also not enough books. I walk out of the room everyday, really frustrated.

The principal said to me, "What's going on? Are you in a bad mood?" It's not that, because I'm in a good mood all the time, but I just don't have time to do it all! The timetable is a real problem and, to top it off, I have to share the grade four class with the principal! On parent night he talked about really structured things and I talked about project work. That must have been confusing to the parents, and they have really high expectations. One parent told me that her child was interested in insects and she wanted me to enrich his program. I asked for parent volunteers and they said that they would help make things at home, but they weren't willing to come in and help with the kids in the classroom. I'm worried about trying field trips, too. I don't think the parents would appreciate me taking their kids all day on a field trip, when they would be missing other subjects.

This whole situation is frustrating to me. I'm usually fairly aggressive and I find out what's going on in education - like the Program Continuity Policy. But I hate to tell the principal that I feel like he's holding me back, because I would end up nagging. I feel like he's thinking, "Oh shut up Marie, never mind." So instead, I just say casually, "Guess what I read about?" That sort of thing is better because you don't come across sounding like an authority. It seems like male administrators have this power thing. They don't like to be the underdog and if you know more than they do, then they get upset. It kind of bugs me!

My Journal Reflections - October, 1991:

Marie is busy trying to put many new programs and ideas into place in her grade four classroom; however, she is uncertain about her role in the school's special education program and largely unhappy with her teaching responsibilities. In terms of Belenky's (1986) classification of women's ways of knowing, Marie appears to be in the stage of "received knowledge." While she wants to demonstrate forward thinking teaching behaviors, she is looking outside herself for the answers to improve pedagogical practice. Upon receiving new knowledge, she is having trouble using it to construct her own meaning. She feels constrained by the fragmented context in which she is teaching and by the lack of personal planning time. As she speaks, the frustration is evident in her voice. Everything is bothering her - including the chauvinistic tendencies of male administrators. She seems to feel powerless.

In addition, Marie did not come away from the workshop with a solid understanding of the underlying philosophy of the Project Approach, and doesn't seem to trust in her ability to use the perceptions that she did gain, in her own way. She acknowledges that she is not implementing the project in the "right way;" however, she also seems unable to find "her way." She feels restricted by curriculum requirements, parent expectations, and administrative limitations. Her "big dreams" have not materialized, and she appears "overwhelmed" with her diverse roles and responsibilities, both in and out of school.

November, 1991:

It seems like our last research session was only yesterday! I really haven't progressed much since then. I'm not happy with how my project is going. The research isn't working well. We don't have enough resources and the topic doesn't seem appropriate for project work. We didn't go on the field trip, because the museum is closed for the winter and, in our school, you usually take the kids on trips at the end of the school year. In a small town, the primary grades have gone on all the interesting field trips. I know they would still get something out of them in grade four, but the kids still say, "Oh, the kindergarteners went there. Where's left for us to go?" I only teach half time so subject integration is only in social studies and language arts. I don't teach science or math, so that makes total integration impossible.

My expectations of project work were much greater than it's turning out for me. I realized that I had skipped Phase I after our group session, but I didn't know if I could get back into it, so I just kept on going with Phase II. They are finding answers to the questions that they formulated, but it's difficult for them. Last year we had grade seven students come down once a week to do centers with us, but that's not happening this year - just too busy.

We've already started working on the Christmas concert and that takes up more time. I have to give up a lot of time for practice and it shouldn't have to be a musical extravaganza!. But the thing that bothers me most is that we mean nothing in the scheme of things. We don't have any choice of what we will do. We're insignificant and it doesn't matter if we're there or not.

My Journal Reflections - November, 1991:

Marie is expressing even more stress with both the Project Approach and with her teaching situation. While she said little during this session, she demonstrated a despondent attitude and I could sense her growing frustration. When a teacher feels that "nothing is going right," these feelings are directed inward, often causing resentment and insecurity. Such negative *feelings are pervasive and one problem leads to another. When one is in this frame of mind, effective problem solving is almost impossible. I believe that this may be what Marie was experiencing during the fall term.*

My Journal Reflections: January, 1992

Over the holidays, Marie called me and said that she was just too busy to continue with the research study. I accepted her decision without prejudice, but asked her if I could have one last interview before she left the study. She willingly agreed. Following are some of her concluding comments.

Project work was much different than what I expected it to be when I first heard about it at a Program Continuity meeting. I feel that it is another approach that adds variety and it does try to meet everyone's needs - if it's the way that a person wants to go. I feel that grade four students need more research skills to do projects, and that these weren't in place when I tried this project. Also the topic was fairly heavy and too historical for the approach. They had to do lots of reading and I had to try to use people as resources. I couldn't just go on field trips, but I don't think they would have been beneficial, anyway. I didn't do Phase I; Phase II was the research part that didn't work very well; Phase III was good, but it was similar to what I always do with the kids. The whole thing became much like an independent study. I did encourage bulletin board displays more than I usually do, but then their final displays ended up being kind of the same. I had greater expectations for ways in which they could share and communicate learnings. The biggest advantage was that the students had a choice of what aspect of the topic that they wanted to research, based on their initial questions. Because it was their choice, maybe their interest was greater.

I don't feel that games are covered in the project approach. I had them do games, like bingo, using terminology and concepts from Albertan history. I feel this is really important and we never heard about this in the workshop.

And I still don't understand how centers relate to project work. I do open-ended centers, but I don't know how you handle centers when some students get their work done faster and the slower ones might not get it done at all - especially if everyone is doing something different. In units, you have objectives, tasks, and outcomes and you know what you're doing. Whereas, when you do a project, I don't know how those fit. And how does drama fit in? It doesn't make sense to me to try to integrate all the subjects at the grade four level. As you get higher in grades, you are more accountable for being sure they learn certain skills. In primary grades, it's easier to do the memories phase, because the kids have more background knowledge about the topics you're doing. But, as you get higher up, they don't have this necessary background knowledge. For example, the kids don't know much about the depression years or about the war. Parents asked me at interview time if I was covering all the bases with the Project Approach. But I can't really see projects being done in a structured way, as they lean more to choice. The biggest concern for me is evaluation and being accountable.

The students presented their final work in December, but I'm not sure that the parents were pleased with what they were doing, so I backed it up with goals from the curriculum. I had to show them that I was covering the curriculum. I also have to prove to the social studies consultant that I am covering all the curriculum goals. He always wants to see notebooks, and I'm afraid that they don't have enough in their notebooks to show him what they did. I have to look through all the notebooks to see if they've missed anything before he comes next week. I really don't think the issues that we are expected to cover in this curriculum would come up in the Project Approach if the teacher doesn't initiate most of the questions. When you have a consultant come in to evaluate the program, it sometimes interferes with your freedom to explore and try new things.

I'll try anything for a challenge - I'm a sucker for that! I try new programs for change and because the kids need variety. But, I always question what I try. I want to teach in the way that children learn best. I believe that "time on task" and "efficiency" are really important. What I worried about with the Project Approach was, "Are the kids making good use of their time?" But I don't get upset if the things that I try don't work - as long as we're not at it for too long.

I think that it all boils down to time - having time to plan and really use the new ideas. The journalling was valuable for me, but I haven't got the time because of personal commitments. As for the group sessions, I think the sharing was great, but again I don't have the time to travel, especially when some of them were on Saturdays.

My Interpretation

Marie recognizes that, while the Project Approach does have some merit, it just didn't work for her at this time in her teaching career. Many of her statements reveal her lack of understanding of the principles of the approach, for example, "games" are highly recommended as learning resources, and "display" is only one suggested way of communicating learning in Phase III. As well, Marie does not accept the value of first finding out what children know and then building on their existing knowledge, however limited that knowledge may be. She also clearly states her anxieties about personal accountability, and cannot reconcile this concern with external demands as she experiments with her version of the Project Approach.

I see Marie as a teacher firmly planted in a positivist paradigm, while struggling to implement pedagogical strategies that are constructivist in nature. The resulting internal conflict inhibits change. Marie is a long term teacher, and the longer a teacher has been immersed in a particular way of teaching, the more difficult it may be for him or her to change. She did not get actively involved in the type of ongoing reflective inquiry that can lead toward a paradigm shift. Her time was too limited; her schedule was too demanding; her traditional beliefs were too firmly ingrained; and the personal risks were too great. However, I appreciate Marie's participation, and believe that her situation is typical of that of many teachers as they *explore new ideas in the classroom. We can better understand professional learning by examining the real problems of teachers, just as we gain insight from studying their successes. I will provide additional analysis of situations similar to Marie's in more detail in Chapter IX.*

In further reflecting on Marie's story, I feel that Ashley demonstrated remarkable resilience to stay with the project and to continue to struggle with the issues when she interacts with this veteran teacher and colleague on a day to day basis. Typically, this frustrated attitude rubs off on those people who are most closely aligned with the individual who is in a negative state of mind. However, in spite of the fact that they work closely together in the school, Ashley seems to think and act independently. It is also interesting to note that Ashley made her greatest discoveries during this time in the research study. After the January session, she made progress in both understanding and using project work in her classroom. While this may be a coincidence, it is an interesting aside which will be dealt with in more detail later in the study.

Summary

The descriptive and interpretive data presented in this chapter shows how four teachers put into practice the understandings they gained from an experiential workshop on the Project Approach. It focuses on stories of their teaching and learning experiences with students and colleagues, during experimentation with project work in their classrooms. The stories are presented in the language of the teachers, as narrated during discussion group sessions, conversational interviews, and in their dialogue journals.

The project work stories are all very different. Each teacher interpreted and used the knowledge gleaned in diverse ways, reflecting their unique understandings and individual circumstances. The project work in each classroom reflected different levels of participation with the approach and different degrees of involvement with the suggested activities. Each teacher had different initial goals and also perceived the potential value of the approach differently. In addition, each research participant measured success in their own way and by their own standards.

The Project Approach Workshop, followed by personal reflection, professional dialogue, and positive communications within a supportive context, seems to have been an effective motivator and change agent for the research participants; however, it required diligence and dedication on the part of the teacher, as well as a sincere commitment to make meaningful educational changes that would result in improved student learning, in spite of the risks of collegial rejection and administrator censure. The teachers' ability to struggle with the ideas and to persevere with the task of understanding the approach over the two year period largely determined its continuance as an integral part of their pedagogies.

The professional learning of the teachers as presented in these case studies can be directly related to the framework which grew out of the literature review in Chapter II. I initially suggested that teachers can develop deeper understanding through experiences of professional learning. Through their explorations, these research participants demonstrated the conditions under which such personal development can occur. During the data collection period, they actively experimented with new ideas and increasingly became more perceptive about the principles of project work, confident in their ability to make personal meaning of the approach, sensitive to their pedagogical practice, articulate about their educational beliefs, and reflective about their personal values. Each one became more aware of his or her real teaching self and individually chose either to pursue or not to pursue the approach further. In conclusion, the findings support the initial premise that change is indeed a dynamic and interactive process, focusing on the individual's personal experience as he or she creates meaning through social interaction. Professional learning is a meaning making process that contributes to educational and personal change.

Brad appears to have made many changes in his practice over the past two years, as he brought his pedagogy more in line with his philosophy through his experiences with project work and other experiential strategies. Project work was, for Rachael, only one component of many desired changes during a frustrating year in which she also strove to bring together theory and practice in the reality of her everyday classroom. Ashley developed new pedagogical strategies through her explorations with the Project Approach, but was unable to sustain project work the following year. She is presently unsure of the direction that her teaching will take next year, but does not see herself using this approach. Project work was ineffective for Marie, up until the time she left the study, six months after the initial workshop.

As I further explored the meaning that the teachers made of the project approach four themes began to emerge. First, the teachers presented themselves as *authentic* beings who expressed a wide range of genuine emotions as each one strived to make sense of individual pedagogical practice. They revealed both understandings and misunderstandings as they told their stories and reflected on their teaching. Second, they began to demonstrate feelings of *empowerment* as they reflected on their experiences with project work, integrating previous and new learning and then acting upon their self-discoveries. Third, the teachers openly talked about the *ambiguities* involved in using new ideas that were often in conflict with the expectations of others and with their own existing philosophies. Each individual's level of tolerance in dealing with this confusion affected his or her personal meaning making. Finally, the narrative experiences and the resulting interpretations of the teachers, the students, and the researcher uncovered important *insights* that provided each individual with an opportunity for self-examination and self-evaluation. As a result the participants and the readers are also left with a deeper understanding of the Project Approach as a pedagogical method and of the individuals who undertook this personal and professional challenge.

CHAPTER VII

MOVING BEYOND PROJECT WORK

> For each of us, the more we understand ourselves and can articulate reasons why we are what we are, do what we do, and are headed where we have chosen, the more meaningful our curriculum will be. The process of making sense and meaning of our curriculum, that is, of the narratives of our experience, is both difficult and rewarding.
>
> Michael Connelly & Jean Clandinin, 1988, p. 11

Introduction

Although the Project Approach is central to the research inquiry, the research participants uncovered other underlying pedagogical and personal issues during their exploration. These issues go beyond the immediate and specific concerns of project work and are represented in the anecdotes and stories which follow in this chapter. The narrative dialogues demonstrate ways in which individual teachers confront personal problems, dilemmas, frustrations, and joys as they became actively involved in constructing meaning through personal experience and collegial interaction. Through unpacking these narratives, each individual came to better understand self as teacher.

I selected portions of dialogue to construct twenty-six stories that move the study beyond the Project Approach to gain additional insight into how and why teachers make significant pedagogical changes. Sometimes these stories are directly related to professional learning or project work; sometimes they are motivated by project work, but unrelated to it; sometimes they are indirectly related to project work and directly related to the challenges and choices afforded the teachers, as they experience changing perceptions and deeper understanding during professional learning activities. I feel that it is important to present the dialogue in the teachers' own voices in order for the reader to better understand the nuances in their spoken language. Specific phrases will later be extrapolated from these stories to develop the four themes of authenticity, empowerment, ambiguity tolerance and insightfulness in Chapters X and to extend these themes into related concepts in Chapter IX.

As I explained in the research design chapter, the stories will be presented both in the form of embedded dialogue and as anecdotes which stand on their own to bring deeper meaning to the issues at hand. From one to two years after each of the stories was told, the teachers read those in which they had played a central role. They then responded by interpreting the message the story held for them personally, arriving at what they perceived to be the theme of the story. These themes are presented as concluding statements in each interpretive paragraph. As a final step in this process, I commented on both the original story and their interpretations of that story. My comments are sometimes interpretive in nature; sometimes they provide additional information to give the story deeper meaning, while at other times they are editorial reflections. My final comments were also shared with each teacher to provide them with another layer of interpretive analysis.

Because I feel that it is important to present this descriptive and interpretive data in a manner that can be readily understood by my readers, I have chosen to use Spradley's (1980, pp. 112-121) method of taxonomic analysis as an organizational structure for this chapter. Spradley (1980) believes that analytical organization provides a deeper interpretation of a research investigation and says: "Cultural meaning arises, in part, from the way things are organized, the way they are related to one another" (p. 112). The "box diagram" that I selected to organize the narrative data is presented on the following page. This taxonomic diagram can effectively guide the reader in the interpretation of the information presented in this chapter. The conversational stories are organized by topic under three broad categories: 1) Changing Organizational Structures, 2) Congeniality and Collegiality, and 3) Challenges and Choices. Each of the above sections is further made up of three groups of stories. The first section deals with the ways in which teachers structure the learning environment and plan for learning experiences and assessment strategies within this setting. The second section focuses on issues of personal and professional relationships which develop naturally, through planned activities, and as a result of shared experiences. The third section addresses the challenges and choices faced by teachers in the day-to-day realities of the classroom. It identifies constraints preventing change, ethical issues involved with changing pedagogy, and ways in which the research participants build theory from reflections of their pedagogical experiences.

The four themes that were identified in the previous chapter also become stronger through an exploration of the underlying meaning of the stories as they are presented under the three broad headings listed above. The teachers further demonstrate their authenticity as they struggle with educational issues in all aspects of their teaching, not solely during the time they devote to project work. They continue to contemplate both their own and their student's empowerment as they consider whether or not they are

Topics Beyond Project Work

Changing Organizational Structures	**Structuring Time, Space, and Materials**	Changing Timetables in Changing Times
		Sharing Space and Materials
	Planning Learning Experiences	Selecting Topics for Experiential Learning
		Moving Beyond Traditional Planning
		Toward Democratic Planning
	Planning Student Assessment	Struggling With Evaluation Issues
		Assessing Through Portfolios
Congeniality and Collegiality	**Developing Relationships**	Sharing Memorable Experiences
		Seeking Supportive Relationships
		Cross Grade Liaisons
	Planned Change Initiatives	A Program Innovation
		Visits to Innovative Schools
		Staff Meetings
	Tried and Tested Teaching Suggestions	Making Puppets
		Math Comes Alive
		Integrating Learning Activities
Challenges and Choices	**Constraints**	Impossible Frustrations
		Inappropriate Instructional Materials
		Denying Service to Students
	Ethical and Moral Issues	What is Educational Equality?
		What is Teaching?
		What is Learning?
		Should Students Fail?
	Building Theory from Experience	Seeking the Light
		Words and Concepts
		The Learning Process

really free to act upon their desires and to make pedagogical changes. Their stories reveal the choices they make as they try to act in accordance with their newly developing understandings. In so doing, their need to tolerate ambiguity also underlies each personal experience. The theme of insightfulness permeates the interpretations of the teachers following each narrative. As well, my insights are implicitly identified in the organization and selection of topics for this chapter and explicitly expressed in my comments at the conclusion of each dialogue.

Changing Organizational Structures

There are three groups of stories in this section under the headings, Structuring Time, Space, and Materials, Planning Learning Experiences, and Planning Student Assessment. These stories focus on the teachers' skills and knowledge in planning and organizing the physical environment to support both the children's learning experiences and the ways in which these experiences can be evaluated effectively. The themes of empowerment and ambiguity tolerance are central issues underlying the teachers' authentic experiences with planning and their insights about organizational structures.

Structuring Time, Space, and Materials

The teachers seem to benefit from sharing stories of the ways in which they provide "structure," focusing on how the classroom environment can be best organized to facilitate a community of learners. Teachers make complex time management decisions, both inside and outside regular class time, and such decisions impact the quality of learning for individual children. In addition, the ways in which teachers organize classroom space and arrange for learning resources and materials send strong messages about their pedagogical beliefs and practices. The research participants were aware of the explicit and implicit problems involved in the management of time, space, and materials as they dealt with their changing practices. The topic resurfaced many times in both journals and conversations. The following stories represent a compilation of their conversational anecdotes and stories.

Changing Timetables in Changing Times

Rachael: I get my preps from physical education and one from the other grade two teacher. I take all of her music and she takes all of my science.

Ashley: In our school, it's really bad, because we were told we have to have so many minutes to do different subjects and he said, "You must!". Last year, I disagreed with him, but he got really mad at me. I was a first year teacher, so I shut up and backed off.

Donna: Are you going to tell him that this isn't a Department of Education requirement anymore?

Ashley: What do you think? I've still got four evaluations to go for my permanent contract. (laughter)

Donna: I agree that this is a real problem, especially when government is saying Program Continuity is what we want in schools, and then administrators tell you need to schedule so many minutes for each subject.

Ashley: When I did it this year, I decided to do it my way, but I was scared to tell him that I was going to do centers for a whole afternoon. I thought he might say, "You blew the whole afternoon?" I said, "I'm going to do centers on Wednesday afternoon and it's going to be lots of language arts, art-kinds of things, and some of every subject." Then he said, "Great. Sounds good. I'd love to come in and see that." And then at the staff meeting he said "If you're going to do "integration," just write it in that way." And I could hardly believe it! He has really come around this year.

Brad: An interesting thing happened at our first staff meeting. The principal handed out time table forms, but told us we didn't have to do them anymore! No longer does there have to be time slot set aside for each subject, but he did say, "I still expect you to follow what we've done in the past." Then he handed out county policy, (short pause) but I wonder if it's still county policy? So Peggy and I went back to our rooms and we made up separate time tables and then compared them. They still looked like the old grade six or seven timetables, with all the subjects slotted in. Then I got really uncomfortable with it. I sat down one night and just drew up a fancy timetable with big blocks of open time - I didn't even write in "integrated subjects;" I just left it blank. I showed Peggy and she took a deep breath, because she's not used to that. She said, "You'll never pass that by the vice principal." So I decided, "I just won't tell him. I'll do it my way!" But I needed to put something up for the kids, because they were always asking what was going to happen next. So I made another time table for them so they could get the flow of the day. And when I put it up, I thought, "If the VP comes in, he's going to know that I've got this weird timetable anyway." So I showed it to him one day and he said, "Oh. No problem. We're flexible." I was shocked!

Rachael: I changed my timetable since Christmas. It took a lot of talking to my principal, but now I have a whole week on two sheets of paper. I don't have to write as much and this is a major feat - my private conservation project. But when it's all written down, I really saw how I was fragmenting things - even more than I realized. I just made bigger blocks of time. I consciously sat down and went over my curriculums in each subject area and wrote down all the concepts that must be taught in each one. When I sat how one concept related to other ones, then I decided I could do it at another time, and that freed me up to make larger blocks. For example, conservation can be part of both math and science. Then I put "integration" as a period on my timetable and I found that by writing in that word, that was a way of reminding myself. As long as I was covering all these areas, then I could do whatever topic I wanted and that's when I could do project work. And I realized that just because it says that on the timetable, I don't have to do that subject. But the first months back, I bowed to the pressure because it was easier to do what it said on the timetable. Now I think I'm back on stream! I'm trying to get a rough idea of what activities I think the children might want to become involved in and I write them roughly down on one sheet of paper - Monday through Friday. For example, now they're reading stories in language arts about giants. I think they might draw pictures of giants, and that's art. And maybe

> I want them to measure giants and that ties in with math, so I can schedule this little activity here in math time. I found that just dividing it down into subjects, I was able to see where the activities all might fit. And then I don't write it down in pen. To me, if it's in pen, then it's non-negotiable. If it's in pencil, then I can erase it the night before and change my mind. Then I write over the pencil in pen to show that it's done. When I do the plan in pencil, I can take off from where the kids actually left off the day before, and not from where I had thought they just might be. I am now integrating more things, and crossing off when I have paid attention to a particular subject concept.

Ashley's Interpretation:

I really should stand up for myself more. I just not a pushy person, because I don't like being treated that way. But I am prepared to express my ideas if I think the issue is really important. I think I'm getting better at it now. Rachael has some excellent ideas. I like her idea of writing down the concepts and seeing how they relate to one another. I've never thought of doing that before. It sounds effective, but a lot of work. I do need to work on subject integration more. Being a new teacher is about being afraid!

Brad's Interpretation:

I was afraid to be different. I guess that I am a "teacher pleaser", too. I want my administrators to be happy with me, but at the same time..... A teacher needs to be free to branch out and try new things. He or she needs the support of the administration.

Rachael's Interpretation:

It's not always easy to leave the books on the shelf - often much easier to follow a teacher's guidebook. We follow blindly along, thinking the rules are inflexible, but they're really not! We try to decide on the purpose of teaching -

knowledge? attitudes? skills? The purpose of teaching is the application of knowledge, attitudes, and skills to your own situation.

Comment:

The teachers' timetable concerns represent the problematic reality of making pedagogical change. Both Ashley and Brad are dealing with feelings of insecurity about sharing alternate time table formats. Ashley was previously overpowered by her principal, so she is doubly nervous. Brad is in his third year of teaching, but still not completely confident in breaking away from traditional structures. This represents typical beginning teaching behavior, and demonstrates both the pressures felt by novice teachers and the ways in which administrators control the school community. However, each teacher takes the necessary risk to "do it my way" and finds, to his or her amazement, their voices are heard. Perhaps these successes help them to build higher levels of self-efficacy, encouraging them to take appropriate risks throughout the next two years; however, they both still recognize that they would like to be more assertive.

Rachael's complex planning method is somewhat overwhelming to Ashley, but she is curious about the procedure and recognizes the value of the exercise. Rachael's organizational strength, as well as her insight and ingenuity, help her to satisfy her personal need for accountability, while still affording her creative flexibility. This type of lateral thinking is a great asset and talent when one is integrating new ideas into existing mental structures.

Sharing Space and Materials

Rachael: The effectiveness of different group sizes has to do with the way that kids face. I have to arrange them so I can connect with each child through eye contact. I have them placed so they can all see each other, but they can all turn to see the board, as well.

Donna: Do you change your groupings often?

Rachael: Probably every three weeks. I find that they are comfortable now with moving around, but I have to tell them that I have them in this place now for a reason. I let them go sit somewhere else but their property is in one place so they know where their stuff is stored. Sometimes, they say, "I don't want to work here. Can I go somewhere else?" I use egg cartons and milk cartons for partitions and shelving. I took out some of my original shelving to make more nooks and crannies for them to read in. I have a large low table that they kneel around.

Donna: You have some communal property too, right? I had a teacher in a workshop once who was quite uptight with asking the kids to share property. He felt that everyone need their own materials so they could learn to be responsible for their own things and their own space.

Rachael: I have a lot of personal materials that I share with the children and I want them to share with each other. I have a lot more materials out for public consumption than I've ever had before. I'm more likely this year to say, "If you need a piece of paper, you know where it is. Go and get what you want." There isn't much in my room that is mine and mine alone. The only place that is off limits is my bottom desk drawer.

Ashley: My kids get their own materials and put them away, too. They have to be responsible for that. I still have them in groups of four, five, or six for everyday work. Except for Nicole. Her desk is right beside mine, because she doesn't work very well in a group and I think this is better for her. In a group of six, they all face each other. Nicole still goes to work on activities with the group sometimes, but she sits by me most of the time. She is very distractible and she knows it. She gets more done by me and she prefers to be here. If she asks me to let her go back full time, I'll let her go back, but she hasn't asked yet.

Brad: A couple of my kids said they didn't want to be in groups anymore because they wanted to work by themselves. They said they could work faster and better. Angela got tired of helping the others all the time! So I put them back in rows for awhile. Now I put them back in groups again, but it seemed like they needed that little break. They were just getting at each other's throats. The quicker kids were pushing and were upset because the slower ones weren't catching up. It seems like my seating arrangement changes by the hour! Peggy gets upset with me sometimes, What did you change them around again for?" I say, "We just move whenever we need a change."

Ashley: One day the kids were doing a spelling test. They got out their books and piled them up around their desks so no one could see their paper. I said this was not necessary, because if they cheated, then I would give them a "zero" anyway. That should be enough incentive not to peek. I wanted to see what each one could do on their own.

Rachael: I think we have to respect their wants. When I'm writing a test, I want my own space, too. Maybe not because I'm copying from someone or worried that someone will copy from me, but because I need to isolate myself and give my whole focus to the test. So even when I write a university test, I want to be alone so I won't get distracted by others.

Ashley: See, that doesn't bother me a bit! And when they're focused on their activities it is even quiet in the room. Last year, I had them in groups too, but they didn't have any trouble. I asked them this year if they wanted rows, and they said, "Yes." I said, "Too bad. This is the way it's going to be. You need to learn how to work in groups. The only time I put you in rows is for government exams. This is the way you have to function - for tests, for group work and for independent work. This is how we work in this room." I've changed my kids around, too. It seems like I can rearrange the room in lots of different ways, but the kids still aren't happy in groups. I tell them that any idea is acceptable, as long as they can tell me why. If they tell me who they want to sit beside or what they think we should be doing, then we can try it. A lot of them do want to stay in groups, but they have very definite ideas about who they want to be beside. Some wanted larger groups, so we tried that. A couple said, they wanted to be on their own, so I tried that.

Rachael: I think I would try smaller group sizes. Say groups of three?

Ashley: No I don't want them any smaller. I don't like groups of three for most of the day. I can split them up for other things later if I want to. It depends on the kind of activity you're doing. I put them back into rows for a few days. We were having some trouble lining up so, to punish them and make a point about the kind of trust that I need, I put them back in rows. I need to feel like I can trust the kids. But then, the principal was coming in to do an evaluation, and I thought, "This isn't me. I can't have them in rows." So I said to the kids, "Have you guys enjoyed these days? Today, you will sit with your feet flat on the floor. You will face the front. You won't turn around. You will not speak until you are spoken to." I went right to the extreme to make a point with the kids. Then we talked about it at the end of the day. Some said they wanted back in groups; one girl said she liked it because it was quieter. So I told them that they could choose - rows or groups? Most of them chose groups. What was good about it was that the children found out there were good and bad things about both seating arrangements. But now I have some rules on the board, like behave properly in groups and think deeper.

Donna: Maybe you need to outline some specific desired behaviors, instead of saying to "behave properly?" My son, who teaches junior high, told me that he has a rule for his groups that you can't use a voice loud enough for the next group to hear. Specific expectations like that seem to give them more idea of what you mean.

Ashley's Interpretation:

Some freedom is important. It gives the children some control and that gives them more ownership. It's an interesting idea to share materials as a class. I'm not sure I'm comfortable with that. Teachers need to be comfortable in their decision to let materials be "mine" or "ours."

Brad's Interpretation:

I am tempted to teach the way that I was taught, but I know better and often catch myself. A teacher needs to continually be questioning the "why" and self-evaluating.

Rachael's Interpretation:

We all have different reasons for having children sit certain ways. I wonder if we think we're being flexible, when we really still decide when, where, and why? I still have a variety of seating arrangements, but I try to base my decisions on work habits, size, room set-up, etc. I allow student input, but I do have expectations, too. Learning is not always best at a desk with your feet flat on the floor.

Comment:

All the teachers seem to prefer flexible seating arrangements, and Rachael has moved toward more shared use of materials. Effective spatial arrangements are based on rationales which support perceived optimum learning opportunities. For Rachael, this rationale deals with social and emotional aspects of relationship building. On the other hand, Ashley makes pragmatic decisions to ensure the children complete required tasks effectively and efficiently. Ashley's expectations are explicitly stated, while Rachael's are largely implicit. Again, Ashley expresses her need to be comfortable with the decisions that she makes. Rachael's interpretation contains an interesting insight about the "real" flexibility of flexible arrangements. It makes me wonder if we are sometimes only fooling ourselves as we try to become less rigid in our ways?

Ashley uses an authoritarian style of discipline, taking control of the environment and of the behavior of the children by making rules to direct their behavior and punishing the group when individuals break the rules. The problem solving approaches that she introduces are largely teacher directed and teacher controlled. Rachael relates a personal anecdote to express her belief in negotiated decision making, but the message is unacceptable to

Ashley. However, Ashley does recognize the children's dissatisfaction with the groupings, and experiments with some alternatives. Ashley's lack of success with these groupings may result from her lack of a clear sense of purpose behind her organizational practices. She knows she doesn't like rows, but does not articulate the rationale for her belief. Brad also experiments with different seating arrangements. While he casually states that "we move whenever we need a change," he seems to have a clearer understanding of the developmental needs of the children in this process, even though he also recognizes his own frustrations with non-traditional groupings.

Planning Learning Experiences

Most teachers are taught to plan in linear, systematic ways following the scope and sequence structures laid out in the curriculum documents. Experiential learning invites different planning strategies and challenges teachers to develop unique ways of planning to meet individual needs concomitantly with addressing curricular objectives. The research participants struggle with these issues throughout the study and find no easy solutions.

Selecting Topics for Experiential Learning

Rachael: Thinking back to what a project is - it's going to keep me awake all night! I try to remember some of the things Sylvia said about topics, and I think she was right about a lot of things, but I don't think she focused on curriculum topics enough.

Donna: But projects can fit into these curriculum areas, right?

Rachael: Yes, but she thinks all topics should be based on real life, and I wonder where fantasy and literature come in? I think there needs to be a blend. Maybe "Giants" isn't a good topic for a project, but I want to do it so the kids can work on descriptive words and many of my activities now are fantasy-based. I think there can be a blending of real life and fantasy.

Ashley: [From another conversation] Last year we did "Fairy Tales" as a whole school theme, and I said to Marie, "Do we want to do that again? I don't know if I want to. Will the kids be interested in it again?" She was talking about doing "Big Hats," but my kids were not interested in that - they wanted to do "Bears." And I could see "Fairytales" going in that same direction.

Brad: I know whole school continuity is a good thing, but maybe kids in grade six have different backgrounds and different interests than kids in other grades. You need to careful what topics you choose.

Marie: Yes, the topic itself might turn them off. Even though the fairytale theme was positive last year and a really good experience, they might say, "We did this before."

Ashley: [From another conversation] Maybe the topic is "dragons," but what they do with it, becomes the "project". And with dragons, there is lots that they might do. They could research or they could paint. They could research fire and how it works or they might research if they fly and how they fly.

Rachael: You could find out how a plane or a bird can fly - with wings or bones. There just might be some insight into how dragons might fly, too. That could develop into a good project.

Rachael: [From another conversation] Last year when the Berlin Wall came down, I had seven children that didn't speak English. Two were from Poland, some from Czechoslovakia, and some from Central America. It was far more important to talk about the Berlin Wall and the fighting in Salvador, because we had children coming from that "war zone" constantly. We just dropped the topic on my neighborhood and discussed "why did all these people come to Canada and how did they get to our neighborhood." When we were finished, I could go back and show anyone that I had covered the objectives - but I couldn't have pre-planned it.

Brad: I would really like to break out of having all the kids doing systematic instruction on the same objective at the same time in a whole group. But I'm wondering, at the same time, how can I do some of the topics and objectives from the Program of Studies easily and efficiently with the whole group in the morning and then, in the afternoon, take time for project work? I think, "Don't jump in with both feet and make a mess of it."

Rachael: Now I'm feeling comfortable with my small start and I can ripple out when I'm ready. It has emphasized to me how well you have to know the curriculum. You have to know what the non-negotiable items are and feel confident with your record keeping system so you can prove that you have covered the curriculum. I have started to use yellow sticky notes in my plan book and each time I do a concept, I write it down. I think this is a way of sharing power with the children and giving them more responsibility. It's frustrating because I have some great material on some great themes. But they're things that I want to do - not necessarily the things that interest these kids. I've had to swallow some pride and acknowledge their ideas. I think, "This is one of my favorite books, but if it doesn't turn you on, then we won't continue. Just because my name is on the door in the biggest letters shouldn't necessarily give me the biggest voice."

Donna: Could you see doing projects based on health topics one time and maybe science topics another time?

Rachael: That might work. The reality is that I have to be able to prove that the concepts have all been covered and to be able to show that my kids learned those particular ideas in each subject. Like in grade two, you do communities, but I don't think it matters if I choose to do Canadian communities or foreign communities or even animal communities. The concepts are more important. The curriculum resource guides focus on Vancouver and Shaunavan and Toronto. but maybe my kids would be better to study about Mexico and Japan and France, because those areas are more relevant to them. Maybe we need to say, "Those resource materials can just sit on the shelf, because I don't need them." It's legal not to use them - just like it's legal not to read every story in the reader. It doesn't have to be sequential.

Ashley: There are the government exams in grade three and I need to be sure that I've covered all the topics in the curriculum. They suggest that you study Lougheed and Montreal and Oshawa and one other place in BC., and they give you the basic resources to do that. To me, if I don't do everything, then maybe my kids will fail, and that will be my responsibility.

Rachael: But if the children know the concepts then they can apply them.

Ashley: But those are recommended resources and I think they need to know the information for the exam.

Donna: I'll find out for you and let you know next time. [I called the testing branch at Alberta Education, and was assured that specific information was not required; the students were to understand basic concepts and to be able to apply them.]

Brad: [From another conversation] Last year I hoped no one would ask to see my plans. But this year I feel more organized - maybe because I'm doing this project. I did go all through the curriculum and started a chart of all the skills that need to be taught in grade one. I tried to see if I had taught these skills during the trip to the post office. But that was after the fact, because we had already gone on the field trip.

Donna: I agree that it's a lot easier to write objectives afterwards! Then you're able to demonstrate to someone else that you really are addressing all the skills. Maybe that's not a bad way to go?

Brad: My chart is just a start and I haven't got much done. It's hard to do on your own - much easier if you're working with another teacher. I kept hitting dead ends - just like what happened when I tried to do a web. I finally just gave up on me.

Ashley's Interpretation:

Topics can arise unexpectedly. Teachers need the freedom and confidence to go with the flow sometimes. Your possibilities are limited when you feel accountable to somebody else.

Brad's Interpretation:

After another year of planning within this framework, I've found that I am able to "cover" the curriculum while remaining flexible to the needs and interests of the students and myself. Recording "after the fact" does show you've done what you were supposed to do. A teacher needs to know the curriculum inside out to plan and carry out learning activities.

Rachael's Interpretation:

No matter what, I always seem to come back to reality! The ways that teachers implement projects varies with their interpretation. There isn't one way to do it. It depends upon the stage you are at and what fits into your philosophy. What is important to me is that there is real learning going on, e.g. problem solving strategies. Teachers have to have clear definitions of what they want to do in their minds, but still be willing to adapt.

Comment:

This conversational theme appears many times within many different contexts. These teachers are dedicated professionals who want to plan children's experiences in ways that will provide rich learning opportunities. Personal conflict exists when they feel tied to curricular goals. They believe they cannot experiment freely with a new approach because it is not in the mandated Program of Studies. Not wanting to be seen as incompetent, they justify non-traditional actions, both to others and to themselves. Teachers feel accountable to demonstrate student learning in quantifiable results and for their responsibility in these getting results. Rachael has some practical suggestions for constructing her own solutions to overcome this conflict, but such techniques are not easily transferred to other teachers. There is a sense in which teachers must "muddle through" until they discover a method which meets an individual need to "prove" that he or she is accountable and has covered the "curriculum as plan." Teachers operate within an educational system firmly entrenched in linear systems of curriculum design and implementation.

Brad likes to be well organized and believes in the importance of rationality in planning the grade one curriculum. He is uncertain how he *can best integrate the subject area goals with the rationale for doing project work. His initial attempts with alternate planning styles have been unsuccessful and he feels that he could benefit from involvement in a collaborative endeavor with a colleague. It appears that he subsequently comes to terms with these problems through "trial and error" and reflective inquiry but, at the time of this story, he is feeling quite frustrated with the task. He is pleased with the progress he has made in the current year as he plans to accomplish both these goals.*

Moving Beyond Traditional Planning

Brad: Peggy and I were talking about this school bus idea. It started from reading Sylvia's book - plus two great big boxes just appeared in the hallway one day and then they disappeared. Peggy asked someone and she said that the janitor had packed them off to the garbage shed. And we both looked at each other and said, "We've got to get those boxes back." So we ran out to the shed and got them and decided we could use them to build a school bus. This idea didn't come from the kids!

Donna: But maybe that's okay though. Perhaps a school bus can be a topic to begin with, but maybe the kids will get interested in different aspects later.

Brad: Instead of just making a school bus, maybe go visit a school bus first?

Donna: First you want to know what the children know about school buses.

Brad: Just bring up the topic of school buses and then let them tell you?

Donna: That would work. I'll bet they could tell you all kinds of bus stories. From those stories you will find out what they know. Draw school buses. Write about school buses. Think about what you know about school buses and go from there.

Brad: What if the whole group gets off on the weather or something? You try to get them talking about school buses and they remember a snow storm that they got stuck in and then get off on snow storms.

Donna: That might be okay with me. How do you feel about that?

Brad: That's scary, isn't it? But if the momentum built around the weather, maybe we could do a weather project.

Donna: I think so. I think it would develop and evolve - if you started by finding out what they know, instead of trying to guess what you think they might know.

Brad: Well I didn't think the kids were too interested in the school bus, but Peggy wanted to do it - so I just swallowed my pride and went along with it. It turned out to be a good unit. I didn't think I was doing a project, but I was just doing a good unit.

Brad: [From another conversation] I know that project planning is different from doing a unit plan which would be pre-planned in three steps. So instead of me worrying about getting everything ready ahead of time, maybe we should just sit down and just start talking and see what comes out of it - maybe even drawing?

Donna: I think that's very important. The brainstorming can be done in webbing formats. You could put those ideas together yourself, based on all the ideas the kids bring forward.

Brad: Maybe I could tape record the session, and then sit down by myself and just listen and think.

Rachael: But, I think you have to be willing to go with their flow.

Donna: Yes and that's scary, because we have this idea that we have a need to pre-plan absolutely everything, don't we?

Brad: Well, it is our training, isn't it?

Donna: You're right! Anyway, you did your centers, right? Was that your project?

Brad: No, I don't really think that doing centers is the same as doing a project. And my project is kind of hodge podge. I think a project should be something really big and well-planned with lots to do, but mine isn't like that. We went on a field trip and then we came back and now what are we going to do? This year I'm just taking little pieces and trying to build the big picture. Maybe next year I'll be able to start with the whole picture and just adapt it a bit to fit the kids.

Brad's Interpretation:

These stories are about trying something new, but still hanging on to your safety net! As I read them I thought "Now I know what the differences are between "units" and "projects." I sure was anxious, wasn't I? I wanted something useful and I wanted to make the kids really excited about learning. When the idea came from someone other than me or the students, it wasn't relevant for us. The ownership wasn't there. On the other hand, I was nervous and anxious about leaving the "known" (the unit) to try and "unknown" (the project). Lots of insecurity here! I was feeling secure with "pre-planning" everything in detail, but somehow, I knew that I was missing something. I really wanted to discover what that was, but I needed balance and I thought that what was missing might put me off-balance. A teacher often resorts to planning everything to avoid insecurity, but loses many educational opportunities. A teacher changes the most when the new knowledge comes from within, and when one's security needs are met.

Comment:

Brad seems to be feeling his way along the road to new methodologies, careful that he understands where each divergent path may take him. While he recognizes the possibilities, he is still uncertain whether he wants to set off on the journey. I think that this conversation gets his creative juices flowing and he becomes more confident in finding his own way. I threw up some road blocks to question his resolve, and he responded with genuine emotion. I think that these were difficult but necessary steps for Brad to take in *constructing his own meaning of project work. As well, he eventually comes to understand the emergent nature of this type of planning.*

Brad shows that he has overcome some of his original confusion with the concepts and terms. However, at this time, he still does not articulate an understanding of an ongoing planning approach. He develops insight into project work, recognizing that it is well-planned, but that the planning process is different. Planning must be more spontaneous and flexible. It is ongoing, requiring the teacher to be keenly observant and sensitive to the children's needs and abilities. Again, this is not something one can be told; it needs to be discovered through active involvement with children. Brad seems to have developed security with this type of planning over the past year. He recently described to me how a butterfly project, done with his grade three students, progressed with the emergence of each new activity and circumstance.

Toward Democratic Planning

Rachael: I use a lot of "sign up sheets." The kids sign up when they go to exchange a book at the library. I only have one painting easel so they sign up for painting. I use a sign up sheet to see who can take what outside for recess. Bringing things for "Show and Tell" is a sign up too. This way we don't have any disagreements or inequities.

Ashley: I agree. Signing up for "teacher help" at creative writing really helped. What a difference! Then I have classroom rules about how many can go to each center.

Donna: I wonder what would happen if you let the kids decide how many should be in each center at a particular time?

Ashley: There would be twenty one kids in the painting center!

Donna: How long do you think twenty one would stay there?

Ashley: I guess that if they all went there they would soon see that they can't all stay.

Donna: That's been my experience. It gives them some opportunity to do some problem solving and sometimes that decision making has more learning potential than the task that was planned.

Ashley: Then I wouldn't have to put numbers on the board for my lottery. That makes sense. I think problem solving is important. And then they can do it for themselves, instead of me structuring it. Now that we're switching to a new topic, maybe we can try a new thing. But we need the rule about not going to arts and crafts twice in a row.

Donna: It might not be a bad idea to try letting them go there freely, too. Maybe that's were their interests are now and where they need to focus?

Ashley: I realize that. But I just can't let them only do puppet crafts when some are not strong in reading and they need to do some reading and writing.

Rachael: But you may be able to use what they like to do to get them more interested in what you want them to do. If they make a puppet, they might like to write a puppet play. Ask them, "What are you going to do with the puppet now you've made it. You must produce a written product of some kind".

Ashley: It would be neat to try to have more open-ended centers.

Ashley's Interpretation:

I had less structure this past year, but I still kept the rule about arts and crafts. Maybe another time, I'll even give that up. I wasn't ready to last year. With different kids, centers work differently. Some kids last year felt like it was just play time. Giving the kids freedom is hard sometimes.

Rachael's Interpretation:

Our expectations are sometimes too high. Perhaps there is a need for "pre-rehearsal" before you set out on your own. The light bulb is coming one and I'm starting to accomplish my goals. I seem to have ideas, but I need to see how else they can be achieved. I'm relinquishing the reins of control - reluctantly!

Comment:

Ashley seems to need to control the situation and is not convinced that the children can make appropriate decisions without her rules. However, this story demonstrates the beginnings of Ashley's understanding of how she might share power in decision making. It is obvious that she values some subjects more than others. One gets the impression that art is considered an enjoyable activity, but not an essential one. On the other hand, literacy skills are crucial. When Rachael provides a possible solution for Ashley's organizational concerns, Ashley acknowledges her desire to be more flexible; however, I did not feel that it was a firm commitment at this time. She wants to be "ready" before attempting new strategies. At the present time, Ashley perceives that this approach requires "less structure," failing to understand that the need is for "different structure."

Planning Student Assessment

The issue of accountability is often raised by the teachers and ultimately takes the form of heated discussions as teachers tell stories around evaluation procedures and resulting confusion with the best ways of recording, assessing, and reporting student performance. It is one of the most problematic areas for the teachers, both pragmatically and philosophically. The first story is a series of anecdotes and a composite of several conversations about these concerns. The second story focuses on Rachael, as she enthusiastically shares new learning about portfolio assessment.

Struggling With Evaluation Issues

Rachael: We are giving the kids tests in our school, and how they do on these tests determines whether or not they qualify for learning assistance. I was marking them today and they don't tell me anything that I don't already know about the kids. Even though I discussed them before we started, some of my best kids are bombing out, because they are frustrated. Other kids just go zip, zip, zip, and fill in all the blanks. I see no purpose in giving them. Danny Joe is a smart little girl, but her parents were away all weekend and her best friend is moving away. When she had to do the test, she just put her head down on the desk and cried. It certainly isn't a valid representation of her ability. I think we need more anecdotal or portfolio assessment so I could see where a child is at and get some idea of where he needs to go. I think a portfolio should be made up of some things that I choose, some that they choose, and some that we choose together. But it's confusing - there probably won't be things in there that aren't their best work. I'm going to a workshop the middle of March to find out more.

Ashley: Our superintendent sent a directive stating: "You **will** have portfolios for every child this year." The grade one and two teachers said, "What's a portfolio?" and I said, "You probably already have done some of it anyway. You just don't realize it. You already do interviews with parents, and that's part of it - a start anyway."

Brad: At our school, often one of the teachers brings in something new like this. We have an excellent grade four teacher and she comes up with all sorts of ideas. The portfolio was one thing she suggested and we started one for every kid in the school last year.

Ashley: We're having someone come in and actually bring some real portfolio samples to show us. We think there should be some way to show both problems and progression of skills over the year.

Brad: I shared my kids' portfolios with the parents. Typically, their best work goes into their portfolio. I found that using these portfolios made it easier for me to get my report cards done. I didn't have to gather anything because it was all there. When it came to parent teacher interviews, I had it all in front of them and they could see how their child was doing. But there was a problem with explaining the kid's problems using these samples. I should be able to tell them what their kids can do, what is missing and what they should be working on, but I'm not sure all the work samples were relevant. The big problem with our teachers is something else - the idea of anecdotal record keeping is a red herring!

Rachael: I'm trying a system of anecdotal recording using sticky notes. I try to focus on three or four kids a day and I write something about them. I try not to be too negative - otherwise I would write about Cody every day! I try to focus on positive things and try to record things they need to learn next and might be having trouble with now. But I also do write down negative things when they are important, like - "Ryan punched Cody." I put these notes in my plan book and then write in the margins things I need to do because of what I learned from my observations. One day, a child was curious about what I was writing and wanted to see it. I showed her what I'd written - "Too busy talking. Not doing any work. In half an hour, she has not written one thing down." I said to her, "What does that tell you?" She said, "I should get to work." And I said, "You're right!"

Ashley: I do much the same and try to focus on about five kids a day and look at how they're doing in all the different subject areas. Before it was just hit or miss, and I tended to write more about kids who were misbehaving. I write things like - "Christy got her materials out quickly and moved off to do her poetry assignment. She was one of the first people done, but I wonder if she really understand the poem."

Brad: Do the notes go right from the file straight to the report cards or do you make up a summary sheet?

Rachael: I make up a summary sheet for each kid near report card time. I'm also going to collect work samples quite randomly, but quite often during the week. I might say, "Tommy, I want this," or "Would you like to turn this in?" What I want to do is to give them more choice about what they want in the portfolio - what the kids would like to keep along with a sheet that tells me what they thought about when they did the work. Was it hard to do or was it easy?

Ashley: Our report cards are terrible - just like the grade fives and sixes, with percentages and class average marks. But we're changing them for next year. The Program Continuity committee is involved and we're deciding how to change them to get rid of the grades. There's going to be input from the parent board, too. Lots of people have different ideas. The principal still wants some kind of mark or letter, but I don't think it can work both ways. Some parents say the most important thing to them on the report card is class average and if their kid is better than the others or worse than the others. We are going to have real problems sorting it all out!

Rachael: On our report cards, we have room for comments, but not space for as many as I'd like to put. I have the opportunity to say a kid is experiencing success, but working below grade level. But what does that mean to a parent? It doesn't tell them what the child knows or doesn't know and it doesn't even tell them whether or not the child will pass. In my mind, that's not the right question, but it is the question we all need to ask. "Does he know enough to pass on to the next grade and to be successful there?"

Brad: I've been thinking about what you said, Donna, in my journal - that idea, used by some schools, where they give the kids a mark, like 98%, but it is based on how many of the skills he knows. If he knows 100% of his work, then he gets 100%. It's not based on how he compares to the other kids in the class. Maybe this bridges the gap between the two points of view?

Rachael: Retention is the big issue now. My big contention is that we are trying to make kids fit into our static mold instead of making our mold a little more flexible to fit the kids. If teachers would just look at the Language Learning Curriculum levels! It's all written so they can just keep moving along at their own rate. But teachers don't seem to see it. Maybe we're not doing enough teacher in-service education in this area.

Ashley's Interpretation:

Evaluation is a key issue. because there are so many ideas about how it should be done. Parents and teachers need to work together to align expectations and decide what "marks" mean. I don't think that the marks are as valid as the written comments, but it depends on the range in which the student is performing. How should teachers evaluate students?

Brad's Interpretation:

I'm not sure why I said that anecdotal record keeping was a "red herring" - I can't remember what was going on at that time. In this session, we were struggling with the age-old report card question. I've tried to record anecdotes this year, but abandon them unknowingly for weeks at a time! I tend to get caught up with the kids and time steals away. The Assistant Superintendent passed on an idea about anecdotal records. He said to keep a class book and have the kids record many of their own entries. I would direct the student to write a particular comment in the book, and then he or she would do the actual writing. There are no easy, ready or "once and for all" solutions to evaluation problems.

Rachael's Interpretation:

Evaluation continues to be a contentious issue. We carry so much baggage from our pasts that we need to sort out and to examine. I was so defensive about all that I did! I was desperately looking for approval an support from those around, and was worried that I would be viewed negatively. I tried to lead the "horses to water." I wanted them to change - because I had!! Teachers need to share ideas and knowledge at the right time and in the right way. Maybe you need to make other teachers think that they have thought of the new ideas first. Knowledge is powerful. Who has the authority to share it?

Comment:

This is a particularly rich story, as the teachers share the experiences of their individual situations, constructing new realities from their interactions. The key is their intense interest and their questions are authentic ones, born *of their "need to know." These are the times when I realize the importance of having a research group of teachers from different schools so they can learn from their diverse experiences. Ashley exposes a fundamental problem as she introduces the discrepancy between parent expectations and alternate purposes and methods of evaluation. She also provides a good model for involving parents in the change process. Brad shares his perspective of my example of a "results-based education model." As I remember it, the teachers in Brad's school were worried about the potential repercussions of honestly sharing anecdotes about student problems with parents and other teachers - thus, the issue is a "red herring." Rachael provides the group with both practical suggestions and insight into related concerns. Sometimes good questions show even more insight than good solutions. Unfortunately, her interpretation shows that she is now feeling a bit insecure about the forthright presentation of her perspectives.*

Assessing Through Portfolios

Rachael: The Portfolio Workshop that I went to was excellent. They not only told us how to set up a portfolio; they told us **why** we should be doing it. I had never thought about some of the things he talked about, like breaking down the chronological progression of evaluation. He said, "Value what you test and test what you value." That makes sense to me. I've never really thought about how to consciously build self-esteem in learning through reflective self-assessment and to motivate kids through this process. Maybe he talked about things that I knew, but I hadn't actually brought them up to the surface. Another one of the things that they talked about was the value of stories in portfolios - a story of knowing! That really struck me hard, because that's the way that I think. The "story of knowing" should include what I know about the child, as well as what the child knows about his or her own knowledge. Portfolio stories really make sense to me!

Ashley: I wasn't impressed with our workshop at all. There was nothing "hands-on" about it - nothing practical. It was just real head stuff.

Rachael: Here are the handouts from the workshop, along with an excellent annotated bibliography. It deals with these topics - who selects what goes into it; what should be included; what should be done with it; who cares about reading it. Another thing I liked about the workshop was that there were teachers from smaller rural systems. It wasn't just administrators from the "big city" telling us what "big city" teachers think. We had teachers from all levels there. It was also interesting to hear from secondary school teachers. The teachers' comments were very real. We talked about problem solving and portfolios. I think that a lot of teachers really see the portfolio as just a work file. I'm not pleased with the things that are in mine or some of the things that should be and aren't. I think mine is more of a work file. I want to rethink it all. I liked another comment - If you don't know what you're looking for, you will fall into a well of data and collapse into your filing cabinet. I thought, "That's me. I'm sometimes collapsing along with my filing cabinet." I collect so much that it's too much.

We talked about not having letter grades and just using the notion of incomplete or complete. In reality, you don't get a driver's license until you can do your parallel parking and you shouldn't accept the fact that a child might only know 65% of his work. I like the idea that a teacher needs to expect a child to know certain things and if they don't, they get an incomplete until they do know. I think that using the portfolio in this way would change the role of the teacher. But it would be an extra workload and changes like this take a lot of time.

Another issue was whether the portfolio was a "celebration" or a "growth indicator." If it's viewed as celebration, then we only put in pieces of work that are wonderful but, if its viewed as growth, then you put in pieces to show all different phases. For example, in the writing area, you could put in the drafts as well as the edited products to show all stages in the process.

Ashley's Interpretation:

Different people have different ideas on what a portfolio assessment is - or should be. I don't know who is right or how we decide who is right. I think that we need to find out what will work best for us and use it that way. The

way that a workshop is presented affects our reactions to the information and determines whether or not we will implement the ideas in our programs.

Rachael's Interpretation:

The "why" is so important to me. It makes the "how" so much easier. I view portfolios as growth indicators. They tell where you were; where you are; and where to go next. Perfect papers give only one viewpoint and weaknesses are also only one perspective. Teachers are always searching for more knowing.

Comment:

Rachael does seem to value "more knowing" and "knowing more." She obviously benefits greatly from the portfolio workshop, synthesizing her new learning and freely sharing it with the group. I feel her statement about "bringing to the surface" existing knowledge is an insightful comment. Rachael is acknowledging her tacit knowledge - realizing that she knows more than she had previously realized While I find her enthusiasm and expertise contagious, I wonder if the other teachers are somewhat intimidated. This sometimes happens when one person exudes an enthusiasm not shared by others, and I have heard this phenomena referred to as the "tyranny of the keeners." If the time and opportunity had prevailed, I think such evaluation narratives could have become springboards for more stimulating and meaningful interaction in which the teachers may have debated the use of performance assessment strategies and actually shared different report card samples. They may have also begun to debate more philosophical and political issues about the meaning of assessment and its use as a social instrument for ranking individuals. The stage is set for more storytelling!

Congeniality and Collegiality

Congeniality has long been realized as a necessary component of effective social organizations, as it suggests that it is important for people to get along with one another. On the other hand, collegiality is a more recently recognized phenomenon in school improvement literature. Collegiality is based upon frequent and continuous professional conversations about practice, as well as upon shared curriculum development endeavors. In addition, collegiality is supported by observations of one another engaging in practice, and by reciprocal teaching experiences to exchange knowledge and skills about teaching, learning, and leadership. These teachers share both personal and professional life experiences and ideas as they engage in meaningful interaction that leads to new insights. The first group of stories addresses the ways in which teachers informally develop authentic congenial and collegial relationships. The second group focuses on planned change initiatives with an emphasis on the teacher's need to effectively deal with the ambiguity and to make empowered choices about their own professional learning. The last group of three stories demonstrates how teachers develop pedagogical insight by sharing practical teaching suggestions.

Developing Relationships

Noddings (1984) states: "The purpose of dialogue is to come into contact with ideas and to understand, to meet the other and to care" (p. 186). Open sharing of ideas and caring for one another seems to build an atmosphere of congeniality and collegiality in which individual change can occur; however, positive relationships must be established before most people will risk disclosure. During the study the research participants developed collegial relationships and were able to openly discuss personal and professional issues without risking the established rapport. Bateson (1990) says, "We grow in dialogue, not only in the rare intensity of passionate collaboration, but through a multiplicity of forms of friendship and collegiality (p. 94). While there was friendship among the members of our research group, the interpersonal interactions were based more on collegiality than on congeniality.

Sharing Memorable Experiences

Brad: Remember what Sylvia said during the workshop about what children remember? She asked older kids what they remembered from pre-school and they didn't remember anything about the program of studies. Some girl broke something or knocked the display down or something insignificant like that.

Ashley: It's really interesting to think about. You gather knowledge in school, but you don't remember learning it. You know that you can add up your checkbook, so you know you learned math, but you don't remember learning the actual skills.

Brad: I asked my grade six kids last year what they remembered from kindergarten. It was neat that about five kids remembered that Jill bit the kindergarten teacher. (laughter) Then I asked the kindergarten teacher if she remembered "the bite." She did, and she also remembered that the same girl gave her the "F word" a few times, too.

Rachael: I think everyone in my class would remember that Nicky threw up on the grade four teacher. I never will forget how gross I thought it was. After that, the teacher said we didn't have to put up our hands and wait for permission to leave the room if we thought we were going to be sick! We should just leave! (laughter)

Brad: [From another conversation] I brought along a copy of this verse for you. An older lady in the community gave it to me. It's all about teaching grade one and it's kind of neat. [General discussion about its meaning]

Donna: In your journal, Ashley, you commented on your frustrations with creative writing activities. I brought this book called, More Than ABC's. [More dialogue about this book]

Marie: Wasn't someone ill in your family, Brad? Your father-in-law? And is your sister-in-law home with the new baby?

Brad: He's doing okay now, but I guess the pneumonia was causing the spot on his lung. The new baby is a cute little thing, and so small! [Discussion about babies, in general, and my grandchildren specifically] I thought of you when we were driving, Rachael. How did you do in the marathon in Vancouver?

Rachael: I did it in four hours and thirty minutes, but I should have done it in four hours. It was a super experience - over one thousand runners. [Discussion about the marathon experience] My brother took my picture with a Polaroid. In fact, it was the free camera that I got from a Polaroid Workshop that our system sponsored!

Ashley: Tell us about the workshop. How much does it cost? I think there's one coming up near us. [Discussion about the workshop]

Donna: Do you want to talk about the book you mentioned in your journal, Brad? The one on "developmentally appropriate practices?"

Brad: [Discussed the book and personal implications of the concepts. He also answered questions from the group. I joined the conversation and offered to purchase this book for them and bring it to the next session.]

Ashley's interpretation:

The small incidents in school life are more important than the formal learning. They probably are learning lots, but they can necessarily retrieve all the little bits of trivia. I also find it really helpful to have other people share their resources with me. Good ideas will get passed on by teachers.

Brad's interpretation:

I think "insignificant" was the wrong word to use; perhaps "significant" would be more correct. Learning often occurs in spite of us or in ways to which we have not directly contributed, often as the result of emotions being aroused. We were sharing "ourselves" with one another. It is exciting to talk about our out-of-school lives as well as our educational philosophies and professional readings. A teacher needs to realize that ownership and involvement are paramount to learning. Open sharing and concern for each other builds a climate conducive to change.

Rachael's Interpretation:

There is life beyond the classroom walls, but we always return to school! There is so much to read and digest and so little time! It's great to have someone else pick out the highlights. This happens a lot for me as I share resources with a colleague at another school. Sharing sources of information is another way to stay on top of things.

Comment:

Sharing amusing anecdotes is a meaningful relationship building activity. The ability to laugh at oneself and at "life's little problems" seems to help put the big problems into a more realistic perspective. I believe that handling unpredictable and problematic everyday experiences with humor demonstrates well-being and a positive outlook on life. It may also be a good training ground for developing coping skills to deal with more complex problems and life issues. I was pleased that the teachers could laugh about uncomfortable school experiences, however embarrassing they might be!

It is interesting how easily people switch from the personal to the professional as they exchange stories. Each person shows genuine interest in the other's activities, both in and out of school. There is always this type of interaction among the group members, both at the beginning of each session and during the more focused part of our conversations. Such storytelling also draws each session to a close. I am also an active contributor and participant in the sharing of experiences. We reveal self through these interactions and come to know and care about one another in a personal sense.

Seeking Supportive Relationships

Brad: Peggy has done really well with the Project Approach in her classroom. I think the kids have almost complete ownership of the project on schools.

Peggy: But I had real trouble in the beginning. They kept running up to me and saying, "What do we do next?" And I said, "You have six people in your group. You sit down and decide whose going to do what. You have to ask the others what they want to do." That part took some doing. And I kept thinking that I should tell them what to do!

Brad: I saw it from the beginning. A unit about school evolved into a project. That's what really happened for Peggy.

Peggy: Mind you, I must admit that I'm a lot more comfortable trying new things like this under our present superintendent. I know he's flexible and supportive. With some other superintendents that I've had, I would be petrified, worrying about what would happen if they came in and found the kids playing on the floor. I know that our superintendent would understand. I've had some that were nightmares, and I'm still a bit paranoid. It's taking me awhile to get used to the idea that I don't have to justify every single blink I make in my room.

Rachael: [From another conversation] Sometimes, I look around and I think, "Why don't these other teachers think like me?" I wish I knew how to help others see my way of thinking and to change their way of thinking. But I also believe that they have to see the reason to change before they will change.

Brad: Did you ever sit in a staff meeting and get the feeling every once in a while that you're one plane off from the rest? Isn't that weird? Sometimes I feel like I'm on a different plane or on another planet - not necessarily a better plane or a better planet, but that I'm off on my own tangent somewhere else.

Rachael: I also have noticed that other teachers think that I know what I'm doing, maybe because I am off on a different plane than they are. I feel like they're thinking, "So when are you going to tell us all the wonderful things you have learned, so we can tell you that your ideas don't work in the real world?" I get frustrated with everyone sometimes and I curl up in my staff room chair and I roll my eyes and I make snide comments. But then I get disgusted with myself and I say, "Get back into real life." My most successful approach is, "Come and see what I'm doing. Come and see where I put my alphabet. Come and see the project I did on improving the classroom environment." I moved the books off the shelves and I made more nooks and I put dictionaries all around them. I have a little guy going to the dictionary and saying, "Is this for kids? Kids can use this? Kids can really use this?" He was sort of flabergasted that adult books are available for everyone. And then I try to go into other classrooms on a casual basis and comment on some of the things that they are doing that I really like. I'm hoping to get a wedge in that way, instead of "Well I've been away a year, so I know all about this." You can't have that kind of an attitude.

Ashley: [From another conversation] Even though this was my second year teaching grade three, I still got confused. Last year, when I was fresh out of university, I had lots of great ideas from my training that I couldn't make work. But I kept trying and my principal is really supportive. I feel like I can say to him, "This is me. Take me as I come." And he does. He comes in and out and tells me that he really likes what I'm doing. He said, "Wow, you did a good job of that project!" And I told him that I didn't do it - the kids did. But he said, "I know you didn't, but without you, it wouldn't have happened." He acknowledges what I do and what the kids do and he seems really impressed. He wasn't totally comfortable with the Project Approach in the beginning, but he respected the fact that I was prepared to try it and he's pleased that it's working for me. He recognizes that each project that I did got better and he kept telling me that I was doing a good job.

Ashley's Interpretation:

I need support just like my kids do. I know that not everything that I try will work out, but I need to keep on trying. I need to be true to myself. Teachers need positive encouragement to keep them trying through the hard times.

Brad's Interpretation:

Peggy and I each came from different backgrounds and philosophies, but we bounced ideas off each other and encouraged each other in the changes that we each were trying to make. It's very easy to get caught up with our thoughts and problems and to isolate ourselves from the rest of the teachers on staff We sometimes forget that our focus should always be on the kids. Are we thinking about them when we make decisions, or are we only thinking of ourselves? Teachers need to be *encouraged* to work together and also need to *encourage* each other. As well, they need to stay focused on the learners.

Rachael's Interpretation:

I am very frustrated with other people's attitudes especially when they differ radically from mine. It's hard to show them that there may be another way! Teachers do not always work from the same knowledge base or philosophical stance.

Comment:

Peggy feels fortunate to work in a school system in which positive pedagogical change is promoted and supported by all levels of administration. Peggy and Brad attended the Project Approach workshop together, and thus share similar perspectives as they explore new ideas. Brad continues to *acknowledge the influence of Peggy as a major contributor to his personal growth process. In my latest interview with him, he remarked that he probably would not have experimented with the Project Approach if it had not been for the support of Peggy and the research group. Brad and Peggy give one another genuine reciprocal praise for their individual accomplishments.*

This second reflective part of the story deals with the real problems of building positive relationships with people who have diverse ideas within a social climate that is not always positive and nurturing. Both Brad and Rachael recognize that they are "different," but they both have a mission to improve the learning environment for children and realize the importance of positive interpersonal relationships. Temporarily they allow themselves the luxury of indulgence in self-pity. Brad reprimands himself in his recent interpretive response, using self-talk as a reminder that schools are for kids. Rachael interrupts her negative introspection with a suggestion for a positive way that she might influence change among her colleagues. I think these teachers are proud of their unique differences, but they are only human and also need times when they can express their genuine remorse at the state of education in today's schools.

Theory says that change occurs within a supportive environment and Ashley's final anecdote demonstrates this concept. It is possible that she always believed this, and perhaps even paid "lip service" to it. However, until she actually experiences the power of praise and encouragement in her individual achievements, she cannot truly know how important it is to her teaching success. Because she can also compare this feeling of self-efficacy with the feelings of inadequacy and insecurity that she felt after negative confrontations with her principal, it is most likely an even more meaningful personal insight.

Cross Grade Liaisons

Peggy: It's so nice when you work in the same grade as another teacher that you get along with. I like it when you don't even knock - just walk in and out whenever. I just started that last year with the other grade one teacher. I've never felt comfortable with it before.

Donna: Perhaps some of you may be able to build some links between grades, too. That's part of Program Continuity.

Brad: I took my kids back to ECS and they liked it - in the beginning. But now they get kind of bored quite quickly. Maybe I should get them to read the kindergarten kids a book.

Rachael: I used to do that quite a bit when I taught grade one and was next door to the kindergarten class. We shared quite a few centers and the kids would go back and forth.

Brad: I had grade seven boys come down one day. I was working in the evening and they banged on the window, so I let them in. They just sat down and played with the toys!

Ashley: Last year we read to the younger ones once in awhile. I don't know what's happened this year. We're all involved in different new things and we're not getting to it as often.

Brad: In my room, each grade one kid has a grade four buddy. These things really depend on the other teacher, too. I find that I really click with Melissa, the grade seven teacher. There isn't the same back and forth with some other teachers.

Ashley's Interpretation:

It's nice to have other teachers to share ideas with, but you have to be comfortable with them. Occasionally, we work with the kindergarteners. Teachers need support.

Brad's Interpretation:

Last year, I was mostly focused on grade one liaisons. This year, my class worked with both grade ones and with kindergarteners. We read aloud, sometimes in unison, with our grade one buddies. We also did a joint animal project with the grade ones. There is increased learning when multi-aged students work together.

Rachael's Interpretation:

Partnerships are crucial, but not always available, for example, who pays for the costs involved in sharing materials? The ways to meet curriculum demands at varying levels requires time to plan and to exchange ideas and expectations. I still am searching for a partner in my school, although I do have good contacts outside the school. Teachers search for "kindred spirits."

Comment:

These interpretations represent the varying degrees of support for such liaisons within different school cultures. In Brad's school there is obvious acceptance of inter-grade communication, as he provides many examples of cross-grade interaction during the two year period. I observed a reading project between his grade ones and their "grade four buddies" in which there were rich opportunities for collaborative learning. While Ashley recognizes the value of such liaisons, she doesn't have the same enthusiasm, indicating that the climate is probably not as conducive to these activities. Rachael is rather cynical about such liaisons but also indicates a longing for a deep collegial relationship. From her comments, I infer that her colleagues would not support these cooperative endeavors.

Planned Change Initiatives

In addition to their involvement in professional learning through the research study, these teachers are actively engaged in ongoing professional learning activities. In Chapter Five they presented evaluative comments addressing both their general and specific opinions about in-service workshops. Here they discuss related topics in more depth. The following stories represent their impressions of personal experiences with other "planned change initiatives" during the time of the initial data collection period.

A Program Innovation

Brad: Our whole county is doing something new now called the ADD program. It's like pre-phonics, and is made up unit plans and a whole series of lessons. You learn how your mouth makes each phonetic sound, like what happens when your lips pop.

Rachael: You're doing what? Your whole county? Tell me more!

Brad: I appreciate Peggy because she told me right away that not all the kids are going to need things like the lip poppers. Some of the kids caught on so quickly to the "B" and "P" sounds, that I don't think we're going to have to do this with them all." So next week I'm going to concentrate on going through the whole thing with all the kids, but there's two or three kids that I know right now are going to have difficulty with a lot of them. Maybe about twice a week, when the resource room teacher comes in, those kids that are having trouble can sit at a table with her and go though them all.

Ashley: I've never heard of this program.

Brad: It was developed by Lindamood - the Auditory Discrimination In Depth Program. Our county got interested when one learning disabled girl in a neighboring school went to a reading clinic in the city. Within a couple of months, she went from a grade one reading level to a grade four. It was phenomenal!

Marie: But who's to say that if she was involved in another concentrated program that she wouldn't have done just as well?

Brad: But the parents paid three thousand bucks for it!

Marie: Personally, I feel that any program that demands that kind of time and commitment from parents, teachers, and children will help any child progress - without those dollars attached. But you know, the more you pay, the better it is! People just jump on and off band wagons.

Brad: We're having a workshop every month, and are taking off one whole afternoon for a training session. A local teacher went for training as a program clinician. I think this is a good thing. I never knew that the "MMM" sound came out of my nose! I never thought that the "D" sound made more of a vibration in my throat than the "T" and that they are both made the same way in your mouth. But it's nice for me to know. I'm kind of enjoying that!

Marie: And you think that is important to know? (laughter)

Brad's Interpretation:

This is a story about how a diligent teacher gets excited about learning something new and then disappointed because he realizes that it doesn't solve the "whole" problem. Teachers seem to want "quick fixes" that will be efficient, long lasting, useful and functional!! I wanted to be told what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. I wasn't very brave, was I? But then, when we are told how, what, and when, we become agitated and wish for more creativity. Dumb, eh? Eventually, I did find this program useful with two out of four children, but only as needed on an individual basis. A teacher needs to be open-minded, receptive to new ideas, ready to glean what is important and relevant from a professional development activity and to leave the rest for another time - to get on with teaching using what he has learned.

Comment:

Brad is undaunted by Marie's cynicism. While I also wonder about the relevance of this program as a whole class learning project, I admire Brad's excitement for learning and discovery and his willingness to experiment with new ideas. He shows insight into the process in his most recent interpretive response, and recognizes that, while new techniques are not panaceas, they should be critically examined for possible benefits with individual children. This narrative shows that an open mind is necessary for effective innovation and change.

Visits to Innovative Schools

Donna: I was in Hillcrest School yesterday. Have any of you been there? I was really impressed with the physical organization of the kindergarten and grade one classrooms. They remodeled the school to fit with the philosophy - water in every classroom!

Rachael: Yes, they are really big on planning together and cooperative learning. The principal hand picked her teachers. Sure it's easy if you have supportive administration and hand picked teachers that all have the same philosophy. Then you have the battle licked.

Brad: If you can even find two teachers that can work well together, then it helps. My principal is trying to do some philosophical consensus building - trying to get everyone on the same track.

Rachael: But I'm really tired of hearing about Hillcrest School! Instead, I would like to visit Coverdale - a county school that is working hard at Program Continuity and they are working hard on an ungraded program. I figure that if one of our schools can get a whole day each month for planning, then I should be able to get a sub for one day to visit.

Brad: [Later in the year, Brad and Peggy did go to visit both Coverdale and Hillcrest Schools and this dialogue resulted.] We saw one teacher doing a whole language project, using an animal theme, but there was no integration of other subject areas that we could see. She was doing some neat stuff and we really had a good talk. But, you know, it made me think that we're doing a super job with our classes!

Peggy: In Coverdale School, I think they have just substituted the word "group" for "grade" and we didn't see much different going on. Even there, the teachers are still just doing all the regular subjects and there's no integration.

Brad: We're doing a lot better than that. At least when we do project work, we are integrating subject areas. It gave us a chance to evaluate ourselves, and to compare ourselves to other people. We came away thinking that we're doing better than some others and that's where we want to be! Last night, I woke up at 2:00 a.m. and thought, "Oh no, I forgot to put those journals out for the sub," and then I started thinking about journals and if I should be pushing my kids more, or if I'm pushing too much. When I went to these schools and saw what other kids are doing in their journals, now I think my kids are doing fantastic!

Brad's Interpretation:

I'm never really sure that I'm doing is what I should be doing - according to the "norm!" Visiting teachers in other schools helps me to set my benchmarks. Visiting "master teachers" in innovative schools is an excellent form of professional development.

Rachael's Interpretation:

This sounds like sour grapes to me! I really wanted a change to a new school and knew it wasn't going to happen. Search out pockets of support and information close to home as much can be learned at little expense.

Comment:

Brad follows through with the suggestion to visit another school, taking advantage of his system's commitment to professional learning and its willingness to financially support teacher in-service visitations. In spite of what Rachael calls her sour grapes attitude, she gets excited about the prospect *of visiting an innovative school. However, it is impossible to be completely objective during professional development visits as individuals cannot remove the personal bias during such observations. As well, one sees only a small part of the program during such a visit. In spite of the perceived traditional teaching behavior of the observed teachers, this professional learning experience is most beneficial for Brad and Peggy. They spend the day together, discussing educational issues, building and cementing their already positive relationship as they dialogue about beliefs and practices. In addition, they return to the school with strong feelings of self-efficacy, satisfied with their own pedagogical practices. I also see evidence of the teachers' quest to improve personal practice and also their competitive drive to be "better."*

Staff Meetings

Brad: Staff meetings are good when everyone can agree on school philosophy or ways to restructure our school. But that doesn't happen too much. We do have an agenda, and we have input into it, so I guess we could take more initiative.

Donna: Do you consider your staff meetings to be a type of professional development? (laughter) What's so funny about that?

Rachael: Our meetings would be better if the person who ran them would speak about three notches faster. On the average, they last from about 2:30 p.m. until 4:30 p.m., and we seldom get through the agenda. We have a decision making session where he decides that we will discuss two things and he puts us into groups and then we give a five minute report after twenty minutes in the group. Basically it's been on topics like ideas for the school slogan. We can't choose the topics and it's just too rushed. He wants to get down to the bottom line and come up with a decision at quickly as possible to solve all the school problems. We debate issues like - Will shortening the recesses prevent kids from taking too long to get in?

Brad: I'm wondering about what different people consider to be professional development at a staff meeting? I consider it to be any type of staff planning or even school business. I think it's any topic that I can apply in my classroom or relate to my classroom in any way.

Rachael: I think it's anything that will help me become a better teacher, whether that's a classroom technique or new knowledge in the field of education. How many hours and how many days you'll be teaching next year is not a topic. I consider Program Continuity a good professional development topic for the meeting.

Ashley: I think professional development is all about getting different information to help you in the classroom and to give you specific teaching ideas. Our staff meeting is not that! It is really boring! People think of reasons why they have to leave early. I even consider the advantages of getting married and having children so I could leave early, too!

Ashley's Interpretation:

I still don't consider staff meetings to be professional development. They don't help me to grow and develop as a teacher. They are too often drawn out and a waste of time. I wonder why we even have them. What is their purpose anyway? Professional development days are more effective. They are refreshing and give me a mental break. We can use these days for things that we want to learn about. I learn more when I'm interested in the new ideas. I like to go where I want to go, not where I think that I should go. For me, staff meetings are not helpful, but professional presentations can be personally invigorating.

Brad's Interpretation:

Traditionally, staff meetings have been seen as administrative necessities. A change of attitude on staff meetings is necessary if they are to become

professional development activities. We need to want to learn before we do learn.

Rachael's Interpretation:

Our staff meetings are still the same way as they were last year! They are more announcements - a one way process. Professional development needs interaction between the parties involved - a two way process. Professional development is anything that you can learn from, but not always what you want to know! Before I use new ideas, they sometimes have to sit in my mind waiting for the right opportunity to be used. Don't discard ideas. They may not fit your present situation, but .....

Comment:

While I am interested in the teachers' perceptions of staff meetings, I am not surprised that they feel that the meetings can be better structured to provide more effective learning opportunities. Another purpose for introducing the issue is to open their minds to the possibility. I think that I accomplished this goal. As Brad says, more thought and effort is required, as are teacher empowerment and shared agendas. However, if one considers the primary purpose of professional development to be "getting information," then there is much room for continued dialogue on the meaning of professional learning.

Teacher comments about professional development activities throughout the study support the findings in the literature review. Professional learning is an individual experience, and because we are all unique individuals, there must be diverse opportunities and multiple possibilities readily available to teachers who have varying levels of *experience and expertise, as well as differing personal and professional needs. Their evaluations of personal professional development experiences also stress the importance of one's attitude towards the activity, as the benefits a teacher receives from any particular professional learning activity may be directly proportionate to the time and commitment he or she devotes to the experience.*

The teachers all believe that professional reading is also a critical element in their professional learning. I find it ironic that Brad often comments on his interest in reading about practical ideas for use in the classrooms, but during conversations he most often chooses to comment on more philosophical issues. I believe he may enjoy this kind of reading more than he now realizes. Rachael also reveals her interest in reading about fundamental issues underlying educational meaning making. While Ashley recognizes the importance of professional reading, she also realizes that there is benefit in non-educational reading - reading that may be simply entertaining and cathartic. The types of reading that the teachers select suggest that the most effective learning opportunities may come from one's personal curiosity and desire to grow and develop. It also adds credence to the developmental stage theories offered by teacher researchers. Because teachers' interests and needs are so diverse, they can be encouraged to design personal professional learning plans that address their unique needs and respect their individual situations.

Tried and Tested Teaching Suggestions

I selected three stories as examples of each teacher's participation in offering their ideas and expertise to one another. This is a common practice for teachers in the field of early childhood education. It is also typical for these teachers to support one another by enthusiastically sharing practical suggestions they find helpful in their own teaching situations. When teachers gather to talk about teaching, the conversation often focuses on practical issues in the common sense world of the classroom. Rachael provides an anecdote about a mini-project on puppet making; Ashley describes an innovative math lesson; and Brad shares a creative story about activities planned around the topic of St. Patrick's Day.

Making Puppets

Rachael:

Last week we did a couple of stories on puppets, so I decided to integrate it with art and make puppets. Karen, the teacher next door, had made puppets and her bulletin board was wonderful. She had two students from grade six come in to help. She divided the kids into three groups and told one group they would be making sock puppets and she would help with the sewing. Your group will make paper bag puppets and they will be green. Your group will do pirates. Karen used the instructions in the teachers' guidebook, and ended up the three kinds of puppets, all the same. Before I did this same project, I said to my kids, "Bring your junk from home." We made puppets all afternoon and they were just great - all totally different. It was a great time - paint from one end of the room to the other! I put Cody, whose the world's messiest child, in charge of making sure it got cleaned up and they got along just fine. I just circulated and cut tape, because some of them sure needed it! For my kids, the accountability was for each child to write down the directions of how they had made their own puppets, so someone else could make one using their instructions. The next day, I told them to put the puppets up on the bulletin board. I put the background paper up, but they chose the colors. Then they made the letters. I decided it should be their display and they could do it themselves. They tacked up their own puppets. It was neat. They also learned a lot about organizing and working together. For me, it had a dual purpose. I could do something else while they were working on it, and I could also see if they could actually do it independently! I wanted to display the puppets inside the classroom, but the kids were proud of the junk that they brought from home and they wanted them on the outside bulletin board so other students could see. We had sock puppets and paper bag puppets and even one made out of a pop bottle. Have you ever tried mounting a pop bottle on a bulletin board? Some teachers just thought I was crazy! But my kids got a lot of compliments, and other kids are always stopping to read the directions. Another teacher said, "What a lovely bulletin board." Today, I was in Karen's room and she said, "Oh, we are making more puppets today - out of paper bags. And they're all going to be different!"

Rachael's Interpretation:

My bulletin boards and activities still are joint creations. Karen's bulletin boards are still perfect!! But I think mine fit me and my view of children's learning. I never could produce ones like Karen does because I think the kids learn about more than art. Last week, she told me that it would drive her batty if things weren't neat and put up by her. We learn from others and sometimes our observations lead us to try new things.

Comment:

This anecdote has several layers of meaning. On the surface, it presents a creative art activity which integrates skills from many curricular areas. in addition to focusing on social, emotional, and physical goals. As well, Rachael tells this story in an interesting way, implying deeper meaning. While she does not explicitly evaluate these two art lessons, she descriptively implies that her methods for organizing puppet making are superior to those of her colleague. Her teaching approach focuses on the creative energy of the children as she also fosters both developmental and academic skills, while Karen uses an adult directed center-based approach. She is proud of herself and of her students, taking obvious pleasure from the praise of her colleagues and other students. There is a saying that "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery," and Rachael seems pleased with her positive influence on a colleague's actions. Perhaps subtle forms of persuasion are effective, after all!

Math Comes Alive

Ashley:

I had Sean standing on top of the filing cabinet today. We were talking about measurement and trying to show how tall the tallest man in the world is. It just worked out that if he stood on top of the cabinet, he was about that tall. The kids and I helped him get up there. Then they wanted to see how many kids it would take to be as long as a blue whale. It took about twenty kids, if they were all about Sean's height. We went out to lay down, starting by the doorway and we had to angle down the hall. We got down to the grade five room and they thought this was pretty neat! It makes it more real somehow. We went back and looked at the tallest tree and figured it would take three blue whales almost nose to tail to be as tall as that tree. When I stood by Sean, when he was on top of the filing cabinet, the kids thought that I would look like a midget next to the tallest man in the world. And the tallest man would be ten centimeters taller than our ceiling, so Sean was standing there crouched over. And I said, "You know, he wouldn't even fit in our room. Sean, how would you like to stand like that all day?" They thought it was all pretty funny.

Ashley's Interpretation:

When I do activities that are observable, then it is easier for the kids to understand. The more unique the activity is, the better they will probably remember it. Children remember best what they see and do.

Comment:

Ashley shares an experiential learning activity, demonstrating her recognition of the children's excitement in physically manipulating their bodies to solve problems in creative ways, and also supporting an eight year old's unique sense of humor. She astutely links measurement skills to real life experience to make the mathematics concepts come alive for the children. I think she's right. Her students did gain new understanding from this developmentally appropriate activity and they probably will remember the *concepts - and the experience! After Ashley relates this anecdote, Rachael explains how her students use the hallway floor tiles to solve measurement problems. These teachers appreciate receiving practical teaching suggestions, as do they enjoy sharing them.*

Integrating Learning Activities

Brad:

When I was a kid, I hated doing those kinds of things that go with days like St. Patrick's Day. Last year, when it was getting close to St. Patrick's Day, I thought, "Good grief! It's been twenty years since I had to do all those things in school. No one's Irish here! Haven't they got over this St. Patrick's thing yet?" I talked briefly with my kids about St. Patrick's Day. No one knew much about it, except that the color for it was "green." So I decided to do something about it. I planned a day all around a St. Patrick's theme. Most of them made shamrocks when they arrived in the morning. I read two stories about foxy leprechauns, with lots of description about gold, trickery, reality and fantasy. They had several related language arts worksheets - rhyme, opposites, blending, word search. We did a survey graph of different types of potatoes and made some puppets out of paper bags and a puppet theater. We spent about forty minutes writing leprechaun stories. They did an excellent job. They took about an hour presenting these stories using their puppets. They just went crazy over the day. Nathan's mom made clover leaf cookies for everyone and, after our puppet plays, we had cookies, green cupcakes, and green koolaid. I know that there were some contrived connections, but all in all, we had fun. The kids thought that we didn't do any work!

Brad's Interpretation:

Funny that I put down St. Patrick's Day - my father's father is Irish! Changing the purpose of an activity from just a "celebration" to a learning activity made the day special. Teachers are in the position to motivate learners by involving them in a wide variety of rich activities.

Comment:

Brad's decision to tell this story is especially interesting to me because I had previously pointed out to him, in his journal, that this theme approach may contain contrived connections and was not based on true experiential learning. Instead of deferring to my perspective, he chooses to look positively at the activity and to share his experience with his colleagues. I am pleased that Brad finds his voice and that he feels secure enough in his own meaning making to challenge my point of view. In fact, he convinces me! "Special day" learning experiences that actively engage children in exciting hands-on activities for an entire day are far superior to the type of "holiday art" crafts that commonly paper school hallways before each commercial event. The story also invites another question. Is "work," as defined by the students, the most appropriate school metaphor?

Challenges and Choices

This category of stories deals with the everyday realities of a career in teaching. Each day individuals are faced with many choices that challenge their knowledge, skills, beliefs, and practices. They struggle with the ambiguity involved in making these challenging choices and, in so doing, reveal whether or not they feel empowered to express themselves authentically through their actions The first group is made up of three stories which deal with the constraints preventing teachers from following the choices they may wish to pursue. The second group addresses challenging ethical and moral choices involved in the teaching profession, and the third group of stories demonstrates the insights which lead to teachers' personal theory building.

Constraints

As the study was in progress, I was under the misunderstanding that the teachers were identifying innumerable physical and emotional constraints as they explored the Project Approach; however, upon analysis of the data I discovered that there were few insurmountable constraints identified throughout the initial eight month data collection period. While the teachers certainly bring forward problems and dilemmas, they usually work through the issues within the context of their practice, or dialogue about the dilemmas in a rather philosophical manner. When actual constraints do surface, they seem to prevent the teachers from reaching their immediate goals. They present themselves as external conditions, leading to internal frustrations that often result in an inability to act effectively. Thus, the identified constraints are both of an extrinsic and an intrinsic nature, and are detrimental to the change process within each individual teacher.

A catalogue of constraints is identified by Rachael during the second group session. Because she is the individual who presents these issues, I use her anecdotes to construct a story of "Impossible Frustrations." While I do not include the empathetic responses of her research colleagues, the teachers are supportive and usually, although not always, agree with her contentions. They listen actively to her frustrations, allowing her a voice to vent her emotional feelings within a safe environment. I also include one short story from Ashley during this same session, and another anecdote from Brad as he presents a devastating external constraint, near the end of the first year of the study.

Impossible Frustrations

Rachael:

My principal sets rigid expectations for his staff. He told me that I was supposed to define the "undefined time." On the one hand, it's flexible but, on the other hand, it isn't. And he also says I have to hand in exactly what unit I'm doing in what period of time. This isn't the way I think. I didn't do it before I left, and it isn't the way I'm going to do it now. I work with one lady that can tell you what she will be doing the Friday before Christmas. And I'm thinking, "I'm lucky if I can tell you what I'm going to do this afternoon." My time table this year is a nightmare! I've got kids coming and going all the time. At 11:25 a.m., I have to stop because that's when I have a major change-over with kids. Some go out for learning assistance; some come in for religion; the ESL kids go out, but they all go out at different times; then I have to stop when it's time for the other teacher to come in and teach science, and I have to go somewhere else and be the music-type person. Then, I have to drop everything I'm doing and go for library time. And that's all so poor! My day is so fragmented.

My school is very structured. They library rules are terrible and there aren't enough resource books to do project work. There was a big kuffuffle over the language arts workbooks, that I didn't' even order. I didn't want them before I left and I don't want them now. But they purchased them, and I suggested that we send them back. That way we have the money at school and maybe I can use it for buying things that I like. But the principal wouldn't let me send mine back. He thinks there's no use sending them back if someone else wants to get them next year. I had to keep them, just in case the person that might be teaching next year (if it's not me) wants to use them. But I need the money this year for math manipulatives. I don't have many materials in my room, other than what I personally own. There's a limit to how much I'm willing to spend of my own money. The resources are so poor. I have become a real scavenger. My biggest accomplishment this week was getting chalk and a pencil sharpener in my room. This just isn't part of a standard supply. If my twenty five dollar pencil sharpener breaks down, then we're back to sharpening by hand.

Someone at our school last year decided that all the math materials should be centralized in one location. So everyone had to hand in their manipulatives - all their blocks and everything - to store it in one place. I think this is terrible! Unless the materials are right there in you classroom where the kids can get at them, they're of no use. Yet everything in the school is now bar-coded and, supposedly, I can access it through this lovely new computer system. We shouldn't have to look it up and then have to go find it stored in this central location. I should be able to go up and see that the grade six class has the trundle wheel and just go down and borrow it. Materials shouldn't be stored away in closets!

Even my kids in grade two have bought into the idea that you have to do everything together and you've got to sit facing the front, and everyone has to be done at the same time. And I'm saying to them, "It's okay if everyone doesn't do every single activity," but this idea is blowing their minds. I wanted them to work on some group things, but they wouldn't. They just got the materials and went back to their desks and worked independently. I tried to encourage them by saying they could work with someone else, and that it's legal to sit in someone else's desk and you can choose your own work partner sometimes. But I'm going to have to work on establishing what behaviors that I will tolerate and those that I won't. If I don't accomplish anything else this year, I want kids to have more access to materials and to feel they have a choice in what they use in their centers. I want them to use materials for different things - like math blocks don't just have to be used for math. We can construct things in science and social studies. I don't think these children have had many open-ended experiences. Their activities were too structured last year.

I need to decide how fast I can progress and how far I can push. The biggest problem is that I need some support from my colleagues. There are teachers in my school who can't figure out what I'm doing. The school doesn't have a sense of community, so how can I expect that kids will have a sense of community. One day I wrote in my journal, "Why did you even go to university? You were a good teacher before, I think." And then I decided that was silly. I left because I wasn't feeling comfortable with some of the things I was doing, and I don't want to fall into that same trap again. I don't want to worry about what the person next door is doing. This is what I need to try, even if it doesn't work. I went away because I was frustrated, but I didn't feel like I was being pulled. Now I feel like I need to keep one foot in both camps. Right now, there are still two little islands with my foot on each one, and eventually something is going to give. Maybe, I just wasn't aware of how different I really was before, but I've come back very much aware!

I wanted to do some rearranging of furniture in the classroom. I had them in groups, but no more. They're kind of in a group, but groups that all face the front - because the parents complained about them not facing the front so all the kids could see the board. But the thing is - I don't use the board! But that doesn't matter. You still have to face it! Some of the things that I'm doing seem to be causing such a stir among teachers. Like, I brought in another rug, because I wanted to have two rugs in my room, so they could go to two different places to read quietly. But I also wanted a painting area, and they won't let me buy painting easels. So I thought, "Fine. I'll put paper all over the floor and we'll paint on the walls. I won't get anything dirty. It will be fine." I went into my classroom before I left yesterday and really looked around. And then I went to the other grade two classroom and to the grade one classrooms. My room definitely looks more kid friendly. It's not immaculate and sometimes I think that the parents might think I'm very disorganized because there's stuff all over the place. But the kids and I use it - if I direct them to it. I wish they were more inspired by this type of thing. They seem to want me to tell them what to do and how to use all the materials in the room.

Parent involvement is another problem. The new grade one teacher came to me and asked how she could get parents to come in to her room. The grade six teacher heard us talking, and he said, "Oh no! You don't want that. I really don't think that you should have parents in your room!" And I thought, "What do you mean telling this teacher that she can't have parents in her room? Number one, you're not the administrator. Number two, if we're tying to make this a community of learners, the parents are our best allies." And he said, "One time a grade one teacher had trouble when she had parents in who had their own children in the room, so that's not a good idea." But then she talked to the grade three teacher who has parents coming in all the time. She says that she couldn't exist without their help in the library. So confusing for a new teacher. so I brought it up at the staff meeting. All the principal would say was, "Be careful!" He didn't say that we couldn't have parent involvement, but he wouldn't support it either. I looked in the system policy handbook and there's nothing about parent involvement. How can we make a school-wide decision when nobody provides support and there aren't even any general policies on the issues?

Rachael's Interpretation:

Another frustrating vignette! Nothing was working for me. I felt used, abused, and pushed around by the system. I still can see many of those same "inadequacies" in the organization of the school, but my perceptions have changed and I'm not so upset. I shut my door and go on my merry way. But I have started to become more possessive about *my* materials, *my* kids, and *my* ideas. I know this is not a good thing, but ..... Teachers tend to withdraw in order to survive and the result is less communication and less sharing of ideas and commendations - becoming an island.

Comment:

These problems are not unique to Rachael, as her research partners also acknowledge that they face similar concerns in their schools; however, she is forced to deal with the complexity of all these problems at once during a troubling time in her life. Although Marie doesn't contribute new problems to this litany, she certainly does identify strongly with Rachael's feelings and provides personal anecdotes to support these concerns. Rachael's series of external constraints includes unreceptive students, parent interference, non-supportive colleagues, administrative demands, timetable restrictions, inappropriate purchasing procedures, lack of resources, inaccessibility of materials, and lack of parent involvement policy. As a result, she is under great stress, feeling threatened and unable to deal with her frustrations. These negative conditions and feelings prevent her from accomplishing her goals. Rachael now sees her former frustrations as an emotional reaction to her situation and recognizes that there are other ways in which she may have coped more effectively at that time. However, her perception is her reality, and she finds some respite by venting her emotions. This year, she realistically accepts the inevitable and recognizes her need to find supportive relationships to prevent feelings of isolation and despair.

Inappropriate Instructional Materials

Ashley:

I really wanted to get into a new math program - Math Quest - but the principal wouldn't let me order new textbooks because he said the math curriculum is changing next year. I also wanted a new science textbook with more hands-on ideas, but he said that I can't have it until the science curriculum changes. I really don't like using these old texts. But, I know they work and I really don't know what else to do. I want the kids to do well on the government exams. So I'm using a math section out of one of my own books. This year, I think we've only done five workbook pages, and the rest has been worksheets. That gives me more choice. I told the principal that I want duotangs for the kids to put them in. But, I really need to get some new math ideas. Last summer, they offered a Math Their Way course that cost $300.00. When I asked if they would pay for it, he said, "No, you would be taking money away from someone else and each person only gets so much money for in-service." Well, I wasn't prepared to give up a week of my summer and then spend $300.00 on top of it. But with Math Their Way, it's not worth buying the text unless you've been to a workshop to see how it's supposed to be taught.

Ashley's Interpretation:

I did get the Teacher's Guide and one textbook of Math Quest by the end of last year, but no workbooks, so I'm still doing math the same old way and I have the same old problem. I can understand the principal's point, but the texts are old and poor, and not very useful. How can I do my job well if I can't do what I need to do? I've already spent two hundred dollars out of my own pocket on professional development this year and university coursework is really expensive too. I'd love to go away this summer to a week long course to hear Donald Graves, but it's just too much money, because I'm taking a course this summer, too. But, I'd kill to go and hear him! It makes someone you read a lot about seem so much more real when you meet them face-to-face. Teachers can not be the best teachers possible when they do not receive financial support from the system.

Comment:

The political climate in Alberta is not conducive to change, as financial restraints have necessitated the deletion of many educational services and materials. This results in a "trickle-down" effect. School systems cut programs and staff members. School administrators cut their budgets in many areas. As teachers are encouraged to "do more with less," they are *acutely aware that children can be the losers in these times of restraint. It forces teachers like Ashley to be creative and to make compromises in which they are able to continue to provide effective learning experiences, even if it means extra work and money on their part. Inevitably, such circumstances impede teachers' professional growth and can cause antagonistic feelings. Perhaps Ashley's administrator might be able to provide better leadership through collaborative problem solving if he were to empower his staff members to assist him with potential solutions to these fiscal realities.*

Denying Service To Students

Brad:

We didn't get anyone to come in to talk to the staff about anecdotal record keeping. Things are just too upset in our system with all the talk about the potential strike. No one's interested in professional development anymore. All this has nothing to do with the kid's learning; yet it's going to take everything away from them. Worries about the strike consume me and I can't seem to think of anything else. No matter where I go - grocery store or church - or if I see a parent in the hallway, they ask me about it. We got a note from the superintendent saying that we are not allowed to talk about the strike to anyone at all - even to the kids. The directive came right from the Deputy Minister. When the kids ask me if there will be a strike, I just say, "I don't know." And then there's the added worry about staff cuts. I just hope it will iron itself out in the end. I still teach my kids, but at 3:20 p.m., I don't think about the students anymore. The staff is all back to this other issue. Step out of your door, meet another teacher, and what do you talk about right away?

Brad's Interpretation:

Teachers need to be able to deal with issues such as these openly and honestly so they can be overcome and we can keep focused on our mission. Sometimes outside problems can take the joy out of teaching.

Comment:

The impending strike is a foreboding presence in the school system. Although Brad reported that most of his staff members were against the strike, the system was part of a collective bargaining unit and teachers were forced to go out on strike when the association vote favored this action. The school board in Brad's jurisdiction eventually removed their teachers from this bargaining unit and negotiated a local settlement, the first of the jurisdictions to return students to the classrooms after a three week absence. Brad is pleased that his superintendent was supportive of the teachers, but also recognizes that there is a negative backlash in the community against teachers and that much damage has been done to the image of teachers as professionals. Brad confirms in his journal that he is committed to children as he reflects on the conflicting ethical positions involved in being a teacher during hostile contract negotiations.

Ethical and Moral Issues

The stories in this group focus on the uncertainties of teachers as they face confusing pedagogical and philosophical concerns. There are few "black and white" answers to these problems, and some lend themselves to the formulation of more questions, rather than to concrete problem solving. The stories highlight a multitude of ethicial and moral dilemmas and recognize the challenge of trying to find answers as they juggle the many conflicting choices. There are many narratives that could have been included in this area, but these represent an overview of the types of issues with which the teachers struggle.

What Is Educational Equality?

Rachael: We're having a real upheaval in our school with special education because the special needs kids are integrated into our regular classrooms. I have my kids for religion, art, music, and phys ed right now and they might come in later on for social studies and science, but without their aides. It seems right now they're being dumped.

Brad: The frustration at our school is that the resource room teachers change what they do from one year to the next.

Marie: You think you've making progress and then all of a sudden, along comes something else. Someone new comes and you have to get on the next band wagon. And you feel like you've never done anything right in your life before.

Brad: But I really appreciate the special education teacher coming into the room though. I would rather have it that way myself.

Marie: I think it really depends on the individual and I don't think it should be forced upon a teacher. It should be their choice.

Rachael: Sometimes, it's a top-down decision to integrate them. In our school, it was announced at a staff meeting. You **shall** have these kids for these periods. Half the teachers are going "Oh my gosh, What am I going to do?" Personally, I don't find it that bad because they don't come to me for the academic subjects.

Rachael: [From another conversation] I don't encourage my kids to sit on their desks, but I sit on mine sometimes. And I am the only one who gets to eat and drink in the classroom. But then, you won't find me sitting under a desk either! I guess the kids learn that there are also some things that I let them do that I don't do myself.

Brad: Maybe we need a rule - The teacher cannot sit under her desk.

Rachael: Isn't it interesting that we have different rules for ourselves than we do for our students. There are things that are acceptable for adults, and yet we won't let the kids do them. I do let kids have a glass of water in the room - if they're not feeling well. I don't have a problem with that. But usually they don't even ask to eat and drink in the room. However, if I've been on supervision all noon hour, I eat my lunch in the classroom.

Ashley: I might bring a snack back to the classroom if I've been out for recess on supervision and don't get a chance to eat in the staff room. I just say, "I'm sorry, but I wanted to get back on time, so I'll finish this here."

Rachael: I don't apologize! I just sit and eat! "Don't disturb me." Why are there so many places that I can stand and sit, and things that I can do, that I would not allow the kids to do? Do they really have ownership of the space?

Ashley's Interpretation:

There are differences between teachers and students. If you respect the students, they will understand. I still think that you should explain why and ask permission if you have food in the room, but I don't think it's necessary to explain why you have a drink in the room. I have to talk a lot and it makes my throat sore. I guess it's do as I say, not as I do!

Rachael's Interpretation:

In the first story I sound so accommodating and self-righteous! I still agree with integration, but would like my voice to be louder when I'm dealing with decisions regarding placements. We have little control over many administrative decisions. We often have to take what is given and do our best to meet everyone's needs. The second story reminds me that ownership does not always have to mean "equality." Perhaps "partnership" is a better term. I don't think that students have a problem with this discrepancy. There is a reason for the differences. Teachers often make decisions regarding acceptable student behavior based on safety or logistics. The rules do not always have to be cast in stone. Teachers can't lose sight of their purpose to be responsible for every child in the classroom.

Comment:

As I consider the frustrations faced by teachers when school organizational structures change from year to year, I am becoming more convinced of the importance of involving teachers in discussions about the underlying premises which determine the different special education models used in schools. These are deeply philosophical and fundamental issues dealing with the rights and responsibilities of individuals, as well as human ethics and morality. It is also unrealistic to expect teachers to "buy into" different organizational systems without providing them with the physical and emotional support systems needed to effectively change existing policies and practices. This story demonstrates confusion surrounding changing practices and the fact that the teachers do not use the term "inclusion" (which is the most recent term used by Alberta Education, directed toward the implementation of a program for the integration of children with special needs into regular classrooms) further emphasizes the lack of communication between provincial policy and classroom practice. I question the basis upon which all educators make decisions about quality time for all children within our school systems.

In the second part of the narrative Rachael and Ashley recognize inequalities and incongruencies between words and actions, between adult rules and student rules, between beliefs and practices, between rights and responsibilities. Unwritten classroom rules are defined by "taken for granted" differences in role expectations. Ashley presents her solutions to the problem in a practical manner, setting clear classroom rules with which she feels comfortable. Rachael searches for underlying meaning to better understand the conditions that may undermine the development of democratic learning communities. In her latest comments Rachael demonstrates that she has *come to terms with the nature of equality; she implies that fairness does not necessarily mean treating everyone the same, but that "rules" can be made or revised to fit the situation.*

What is teaching?

Rachael: When you wake up in the morning and you don't feel good, you teach the way you were taught and you move the desks back into rows. (laughter)

Ashley: That's exactly right. You fall back into the regimental style and you say the kids can't go to gym class until everyone is standing in a straight line. You need quiet and organization.

Rachael: And I can say my kids are so quiet that they can go all the way down the hallway to get a drink without making any noise. My, I must be a **good** teacher!

Marie: Well, I think they need a little bit of that too, but not all the time. I think it's neat for the kids to know that they have some freedom, but there are also times when they have to be well behaved.

Brad: [From another conversation] I feel really insecure about using the Project Approach. I feel like the superintendent or principal or parent might come in to see what I'm doing and ask, "Where's your plan? Let me see your objectives. What are you hoping to have the students learn?" And then I'll say, "Oops, I knew I should have done more work last night." It takes a lot of energy to do hands-on activities and get ready all the newspaper and the paints. You give up a lot of planning time. Last year, in grade six, I had everything pre-structured. If we did a research project or that sort of thing, I knew what the students were supposed to learn. In grade one, I know that I should still be meeting some specific objectives, but I don't know how to tell whether or not I've met them.

Donna: You can still teach skills systematically and then the children can apply these skills in the project work.

Brad: But how do I know if they're on top of this particular skill enough to use it? And, if I walk around the centers and see the kids using a skill that hasn't been taught, can I really say that I have taught it?

You think they come to grade one empty and then you find out they can do all these things. They can hammer nails and they look after fish in a fish tank and pull out the filter and put it back together, and you think, "What am I going to teach them? What will I tell their moms when they come for an interview and ask if their kids can read yet?" When the kids come out of grade one in this school, they can write a nice journal, a good story and most of them can read really well. I'm wondering what's going to happen at the end of this year if I don't do it exactly the same as Peggy did it last year? Am I really needed as a teacher - or effective? Maybe they shouldn't be paying me thirty thousand dollars a year.

It's just that I have this image of "good teaching." I was away from school for thirteen years before I went for teacher training, so my concept of "what is a teacher" is probably different from that of someone who started university right out of high school in 1988.

Brad: [From another conversation] When I did my nutrition topic, all the ideas either came from me or from Peggy. I didn't consult the kids at all. I did a "Nutrition Theme." I sat down and figured out what I would do before I started.

Donna: So you laid it out like a unit, instead of doing it like a project?

Brad: Yes, I did it all by myself on the weekend. But, the kids really enjoyed doing it, and so did I.

Donna: I love to plan and pull together ideas and see all the connections. I get a real sense of satisfaction from developing planning webs and mind maps. I guess adults are no different than children. We both love to create.

Brad: I did some interesting activities on nutrition with them. The kids are still learners, even if you do it this way.

Donna: Yes, that's right.

Brad: But, they weren't participating like they did in the Post Office topic.

Donna: Did you have a chance to think about my feedback in your journal? Another way to start may have been to begin with "foods" as a topic. Would the same concepts have come up?

Brad: They seemed to know almost everything that I was teaching them about nutrition before I taught it. They knew all the four food groups, what was in each one, and the nutritional value from the groups. But I went ahead and did the lesson anyway! (laughter) I guess it was reinforcing - that's all.

Donna: It might be fun to do it again sometime with food as a focus - just to see what happens. You could probably build on their memories of food, right?

Brad: I could, but I liked this theme. I was so happy that I planned it all by myself. It was great! I did get some help from Peggy and I used some of her materials, but basically I did all the lesson planning myself. And, you know, it wasn't until I got my journal back and read your comments that I realized, "Hey, I didn't involve the kids in the planning at all!" Then I realized that I was doing a "unit" and not a "project." I approached the nutrition theme with a totally different mind set.

Ashley's Interpretation:

I still have the kids line up sometimes for certain things and go back to traditional ways of teaching. Next year, when I teach Junior High for the first time, then I'll probably have them sit in rows at first, because I don't know what to expect from group work with kids that age. I'll ease myself in until I get comfortable, even though I hate rows! I'll build in more freedom later. When in doubt, teachers teach the way that they were taught, because they know that works.

Brad's Interpretation:

I was fighting the "status quo" within myself and asking lots of questions. When the answers didn't fit into my present way of "thinking and doing," then I felt insecure, which seemed to keep me doing the "tried and true" - or maybe it made me question some more? This was another step in my realization of the difference between units and projects. I seemed to need to figure it out for myself. Teachers have to realize that change often brings

insecurity, but if we continue to question our thinking and our actions, we will grow beyond where we are now.

Comment:

The tone of the first conversation in this dialogue about teaching is interesting, as is its implicit message. I sense that for Rachael the examples are "tongue in cheek," as her tone is rather sarcastic. She acknowledges the "taken for granted" practices to which she is not genuinely committed, but which she realizes are "common sense" realities within the culture of the school. While Rachael pragmatically accepts her cynical views, Ashley and Marie justify their accepting attitudes towards traditional practices. Such subtleties can be unpacked to discover a variety of motives as teachers participate in the taken for granted world of "being teacher."

Brad begins to grudgingly acknowledge that there may be a potential for more authentic learning by involving the children in the development of the topic. Although he comes to realize that there is a basic difference between traditional and project work planning, Brad doesn't completely abandon his belief in traditional theme planning. He is proud of his efforts, and justifies his feelings by suggesting that the lessons are a review for his students. He gives himself permission to work through the planning process in his own way and at his own pace. This is a common theme throughout Brad's journey. Through each restorying experience he develops increased insight into what he feels is the appropriate degree of student autonomy in structuring their own learning. He tells me that he uses a student-centered planning approach for everything that he does this year.

Brad is struggling with basic issues of ethical teaching behavior, and is experiencing feelings of doubt and perceived inadequacy. He seems to sense *that he is on the verge of shifting to a new paradigm, but is frightened by his changing image of effective teaching. He also seems to recognize intuitively that there is a difference between the "curriculum as plan" and the "lived curriculum," but does not yet articulate his understanding. I sense that, if the dialogue had continued, Brad may have gone one step further to question not only the meaning of teaching, but also the fundamental meaning of education itself. I think that it is important for teachers to engage in this type of dialogue.*

What Is Learning?

Donna: My suggestion, Brad, is not to lose sight of the children's interests in this homes project. Can you build on their fascination with power tools?

Brad: I wouldn't want to bring power tools into the classroom. That would be too dangerous.

Donna: Not power tools, I agree. But what about other tools and maybe a woodworking center in your room.

Brad: I'm not sure. Wouldn't they get hurt?

Donna: My college students and I ran a multi-age play program for two through six year olds, and we set up a woodworking play area for them. They used some regular tools and some smaller versions - hammers, vices, screwdrivers, saws, and drills. We made a peg board with felt pen outlines so they could independently put away the tools when they were finished.

Brad: Did the younger ones hammer themselves - with real nails? Was that safe?

Donna: They were closely supervised, and we never had a problem. They were intrigued with using the real tools.

Brad: What about the people next door? Didn't they get upset with all the pounding?

Donna: I admit that some people in the next room didn't like it too much, (laughter) but they seemed to understand when I discussed it with them. The little ones are really quite slow and methodical, so there really wasn't that much noise.

Rachael: The ECS room was next to mine and they did quite a bit of wood working, but the noise wasn't too bad. Mind you, we agreed what time of day that it would be least disruptive. And the teacher also situated it on a wall farthest away from the adjoining wall to my room. Actually, the kids and I just got used to the sound of it.

Donna: Carpet on the floor by the area also makes a big difference. We also put glue and paint nearby, and they got busy doing that too.

Brad: Well, I do see that it might work. Did they wear hard hats?

Donna: They wore those little construction hard hats you buy in the toy department and also carpenter aprons.

Rachael: My big thing this week is accountability so if someone asked you what subject you were doing, you could say you were doing math, language, social studies, and science. I support this idea of projects, but the reality is that you have to show that you have covered all the things you are supposed to cover! This one would work.

Brad: Maybe even objectives from health could be integrated - with the safety aspect.

Donna: If you're worried about showing that this activity covers curricular objectives, you could make a flow chart. You would see that woodworking is an integrated activity.

Brad: You know, we could go on a field trip to the school shop again.

Rachael: Sure, or even a welding shop or a mechanic's shop, depending on how their interests go. What about a lumber yard?

Donna: Yes, they usually give you scraps of wood - free! Then, if kids get frustrated with putting nails in the hard wood, they can build something with the white glue and other materials. They really get engaged in these projects. Wonderful problem solving comes out of it, too.

Brad: I was just thinking - maybe we could set up a corner in the school shop, if there's some extra room.

Donna: That would be excellent! Then they wouldn't be bothering Peggy next door!

Brad: The shop isn't used all day. We could go back over to the construction site and get scraps of wood. The kids could pick them up and pack them back. We could take them to the shop and see what comes out of it all. When we went there on our school tour, a boy cut up some wood for them. And they were just fascinated. They just watched and watched. They knew it was dangerous and they knew they had to stand back.

Brad: [From another conversation] Last year, I wasn't aware of this, but there are so many other things that take up our time in school! Maybe it wasn't as obvious in grade six, with so much departmentalization, but in grade one, I sure notice it. There's the Christmas concert and the Spring Festival, and then all these little parties for all the holidays. We had parent/teacher interviews and the teacher convention and another professional development day. These things seem to cut away from my program. I also hear my colleagues saying that they feel frustrated with the loss of time because of all these extra things. And I just wonder if they're really worth it.

Rachael: We have a lot of extra things happening in our school. This week, we had "Jump Rope for Heart" and that wrecked two full afternoons. Every other afternoon the kids go out for phys ed. We let them go early one afternoon for a staff meeting. Another afternoon, we had a religious celebration. All week long, I only taught for two full afternoons. I hear teachers saying they don't have time to teach what they have to teach. I said that they could just teach those subjects they missed at another time and that blew away their little minds! I think we've got to set priorities and look at what's most important and then do it whenever. You can teach the science concepts when they come up in language arts.

Brad's Interpretation:

At first, I was overly cautious and pessimistic, but with questioning and support, I bought into new ideas. My feelings are very different this year. For example, the "interruptions" last year are "treats" this year. I've relaxed and enjoy being with the kids, no matter what the activity. Worthwhile activities

can take place - even at Valentine's Day parties! New ideas can be genuinely accepted within a supportive and non-threatening climate. *My program* is not always the best one. We need to focus on *our program!*

Rachael's Interpretation:

It is frustrating to have so many interruptions, but you need to try to go with the flow. Plans change constantly, but in elementary classes modifications can be easily made. I am more flexible now, but still have qualms when my views are radically different from those of others. Both adults and children have preconceived notions on how things should be done. Teachers can adapt their plans and schedules - if they want to! Teachers need to be able to validate to others why they do what they do.

Comment:

During the first part of the dialogue Brad's excitement builds as the conversation about woodworking possibilities progresses. He ultimately enthusiastically presents his own suggestions. Rachael's support is helpful, as is my insistence that the potential problems can be overcome. While it is a challenge to explore the unknown, Brad rises to the challenge, one step at a time, until he offers his own anecdote to support a woodworking project. Brad needs to believe that woodworking is a legitimate learning activity. Only then is he able to accept a new option for learning in his classroom. A teacher can remove obstacles which prevent the success of innovative ideas by dealing with the confusing issues through a process of dialectic problem solving.

In the second part of this narrative, Brad introduces a problem commonly lamented in school staff rooms. It has deep underlying issues *about the meaning of education and the "worth" or value of learning. While Rachael responds more pragmatically, Brad seems caught up in analytical debate, within himself, about the hierarchical importance of one activity over another. The debate is fueled by agreement from his peers, supporting the superior position of curricular activities over social activities. Rachael seems to recognize the futility of "changing minds," even as she arrives at a practical solution; however, she fails to address the fundamental issue of what learning activities are "worthy." Brad's current interpretation shows that he has come to a new understanding of the issue this year. Traditional curriculum structures and commonly held belief systems do not appear to recognize or proactively provide for the education of the "whole child." I sometimes wonder if these "intrusions" offer more potential for learning than "what we have to teach?"*

I sense that Rachael is still uncertain when dealing with colleagues about problematic issues. She is living in the tension created by expressing her individuality in a system with contradictory values. Rachael is constantly faced with the challenge of being different, and with the choice of whether or not she will honestly express her ideas and feelings, risking the possibility of non-acceptance. Because she is also sensitive to the child's need to have his or her previous experiences validated, this creates additional tension as she contemplates how she should provide meaningful learning activities.

Should Students Fail?

Ashley:

Matthew is a little boy in my class, who's functioning at about a beginning grade two level. If he moves on next year to grade four, he will have five or six different teachers. I want him to stay back with me. He's come a long way and another year of the same things will be good for him. He did nothing last year in grade two and the teacher thought that he was a bum. Now he's alive and he reads and talks and participates, but he still is missing some basic skills. I know the lights going to flash on one of these days. That's the feeling I get with him. If he goes to grade four, he'll be frustrated and go back to being a bum! I don't want that for him. I don't think it would bother him, because he's not really close to any other kids, and he is more social now than he ever has been. I know that Jill would not have benefited from staying back, even though her writing was as bad as Matthew's. But Matthew is different. Maybe I'm wrong, but I just have this feeling that I'm not. He can concentrate on math if the materials are manipulative. He used his fingers if he has to, but he can do it. Next year, he'll go even further if I can give him some extra practice. I think he needs that more than help in a special ed program. I know it's not good to fail, and I feel really guilty saying it, but maybe Matthew shouldn't go on next year.

Ashley's Interpretation:

I did keep him back and he had a really good year. He's still weak, but it hasn't hurt him at all. It was a tough decision to make, but I'm glad my instinct was correct. He needed more time to practice some skills. Deciding whether or not to hold someone back is a difficult personal dilemma.

Comment:

Ashley is dealing with a contemporary controversial issue. She is faced with the awesome and impossible task of predicting the future for this child. She actively explores the benefits of having him "stay back," determining why this decision may be right for him, genuinely sensitive to his needs and concerned for his well being. However, Ashley does not consider the alternate scenario in which there may also have been benefits for him to "go on" to the next grade. Ashley primarily uses intuitive reasoning to deal with the dilemma and, in retrospect, her instinctive decision appears to have been the "correct" one; however, one never knows definitively if this is the case. She may have been well advised to weigh the options more carefully and to *live with the confusion a while longer before offering her recommendation. Recent research on retention suggests that "failing a grade" is harmful to the child, whatever the age of the child or the circumstances. While I did ask her more about Matthew, I accepted her position, recognizing that I did not know enough about his situation to offer helpful advice. I also chose not to belabor the issue because I felt that she had already made a firm decision. Retention issues are ones that need to be constantly grappled with, at all levels and by all those involved, as there are no simple decisions and much room for error, regardless of the position one assumes. However, the confusion of "not knowing," and the absence of the one correct solution to a particular problem leaves one in a state of flux. I think that many teachers find this an untenable state of being.*

Building Theory From Experience

Some of the most exciting and rewarding times during the study are those when the teachers express, in their journals or during the group sessions, personal insight that shows the ways in which they are making connections among existing attitudes and feelings, present experience, and new knowledge and skills to create new meanings. They construct their own theories based on personal experience, and these theories often appear in the themes provided in their story interpretations. One of the highlights occurs, during the fourth session, when Ashley all of a sudden "sees the light." While this new meaning is personally exhilarating, she does not articulate her process of coming to know. Other insights, which lead to the development of personal theory, are more often the result of long, hard thought about one's practices and belief systems. Those expressed verbally during the group sessions were often first articulated in written form in their journals. The story samples that I select are powerful in that they represent particularly meaningful professional and personal learning for the teachers. They all come from the fifth and sixth sessions, thus demonstrating again the need for time, patience, and active involvement with ideas in changing one's pedagogy and/or beliefs. I believe that such "ah-ha's" are the substance of the teachers' personal theory-building.

Seeking the Light

Ashley: I have been just sitting here thinking, "Now I see!" I've been discussing it with Marie and writing about it, but I just couldn't see it. Now I do! We can do all these different things and maybe Dennis wants to do hatching and he might get interested in reptiles because it has scales like the dragon. And maybe instead of doing a report, he might want to do a poster on the stages or maybe compare dragon eggs to chicken eggs.

Donna: Yes, just facilitating and providing guidance with your questioning. You're still guiding their learning.

Ashley: Now I can see it. We don't all have to do reports. I can see all the possibilities! It was just too narrow the way I was thinking about doing it. That's why my projects weren't working. I think that I was too negative. I got it in my head that projects wouldn't work, unless they were set up like centers. But this way, it would get broader and broader. The ideas are just popped into my head!

Rachael: You've been really struggling with it all. I think sometimes we have to allow people to drown for awhile, but it's hard to do that. I know that I often flounder and want someone to throw me a life preserver, but there's no one there to throw one. And then I suddenly realize that if I just take a breath and let it out slowly, I can save myself.

Ashley: [Later in the conversation] I love doing the theme on dragons!

Rachael: When you said dragons, I was thinking of extending it into housing, because dragons relate to castles and people in different countries have different types of houses. If I built a house for a dragon, how many square feet would need to be in it? Then I need so much linoleum and I need a pool, and I need house plans, so there would be lots of measuring and map work. I did some things like that in grade six and so when I think of things to do with building, that comes back to my mind. But then, I'm quite math oriented.

Ashley: I don't see that connection at all.

Rachael: When I think of dragons, I just think of being an architect.

Donna: Isn't that interesting. It makes me wonder what kind of connections children make when we introduce a topic.

Ashley: To me, dragons go with knights and castles.

Rachael: I guess that I was just trying to connect the topic to the real world, and there are lots of books about castles. Castles connect with houses and construction to me. I wonder how many resources the kids might have at home? What about the Fisher Price castle?

Ashley: I don't think grade three kids would play with that toy in front of their friends. They could bring lego from home though.

Donna: Do you think they could construct a castle?

Ashley: Yes, I plan to do that, but we haven't got that far yet. We're still doing research from the dragon books.

Rachael: One time I was in a grade three classroom where they were doing a theme on castles. They actually built a castle out of a table and some big boxes they painted. It was in the block area of their room. The teacher had the kids bring in their lego and blocks and popcycle sticks and things like that. They even borrowed a sand table from the kindergarten. They designed a coat of arms for the knights. A lot of research went into it.

Ashley's Interpretation:

I still like reports, but I like to allow the students to do a project of some kind, as well as a report. The light came on eventually. Sometimes, it takes a while for lights to come on for me., but I still don't see how housing fits! I wouldn't

want to do an activity like Rachael thought of, but then, she might not want to do what I planned. There will be kids who will have similar opinions. Allowing more freedom of choice and expression will help deal with these differences. Everyone makes different connections and children need the freedom to make their own connections. Sometimes our preconceptions blind us to other possibilities.

Rachael's Interpretation:

I keep focusing on real things - yet I do enjoy fantasy, too. The kids need to distinguish fantasy from reality, but reality is the focus of the curriculum. The connections that I see are different from Ashley's. Ashley is starting to follow her children and finding out that it's not so bad. She finds out that looking broadly at topics allows more possibilities to emerge - a gradual awakening. We have to see windows of opportunity and be open to them. Change does not always come easily. The struggles can sometimes stop the process. It's important to "hang in."

Comment:

I'm not sure that Ashley recognizes the significance of this experience in the process of making meaning of project work. I have a wonderful image of her rapture with the revelation. No one can tell her; she has to discover it for herself as she thinks, listens, and talks. After the "light comes on," and "the ideas are popping," she makes important pedagogical changes that facilitate more student involvement in the selection of meaningful learning activities. As well, she encourages the children to represent their learning in diverse ways, as is evidenced by the different ways in which they choose to share their final group projects. Thus, Ashley constructs project approach *theory, after recognizing that her preconceptions have blinded her to the acceptance of new possibilities.*

Rachael seems to keep divergent ideas in mind as she plans learning opportunities. Ashley does not change her mind set during this conversation or upon later reflection. It seems difficult for her to actively listen to Rachael's ideas, at the same time as she is trying to explain her own point of view. However, this represents an important insight for Ashley; she is involved in a meaning making process in which she actually experiences the personal theory that she later articulates in the theme statement for this story. Although she does not immediately act on her belief by changing her project plans, she eventually sees the connection between her understanding and how this knowledge can affect the expectations that she has for her students. This story is one of active adult learning affecting student learning.

Words and Concepts

Brad: I wonder if the project that I do will be based on centers, like the ones that we've seen in the last few years, or will it be project-oriented? Somehow I sense a difference.

Donna: There are many ways to get started. One way is brainstorming about a topic, then focusing on constructing a model, each in his or her own way, or completing it as a joint endeavor. Perhaps that's a difference between "center-based approaches" and "project-based approaches." In a project the children have a common focus, as opposed to many different subject area activities in separate centers. I'm not sure. What do you think?

Rachael: But I think centers can be interdisciplinary, and can still be focused.

Ashley: It depends on your interpretation of what a center is. If centers are closed ended and there's only one way to do things, that's different than leaving it open-ended. If you leave it open, then I guess that's called a project. I still call it "centers," and I think I can get the project idea across - as long as the centers are open.

Rachael: I just keep thinking about some of the activities I have out right now. I'm trying to think whether or not I would classify them as "center activities" or just "activities."

Ashley: I do mine by subject. I set up a reading center, or a writing center, or an arts or music center based on a theme. I think it doesn't matter as long as the kids stay interested. I want them to be interested for at least two weeks before I switch to a new activity. It just ends up going back to your definitions.

Donna: I agree. And maybe I'm also getting confused trying to think of the differences between the use of the words. I think that themes can be projects and projects can be themes, depending on how you use the word. But it is really important to know what **you** mean.

Rachael: I think of a project as being more interdisciplinary, more integrated, more blurry in terms of the divisions between subject areas. I think of it as something in which materials go every which way and kids go every which way. It doesn't necessarily focusing on just one small aspect of a topic or subject area.

Ashley: [From another conversation] In Rachael's project on "Time", I think that "Time" is the project, and the underlying topics like clocks and ages would be the themes.

Donna: Isn't that interesting because, to me, the project is made up of the small things that you do with the topic of "Time" - or maybe the theme is time? In this case, I'm not sure what the actual project would be called.

Brad: [From another conversation] My kids tell me that centers have to be done in a certain way because that's the way that they did them in kindergarten. They knew my centers weren't like their kindergarten centers.

Donna: Maybe that's why it's sometimes helpful to use a different word. A brand new word to replace "centers," so the children get rid of old mind sets.

Ashley: That would work. They do have certain connotations for things.

Donna: Yes, if we all wrote down what we thought a center was, I'll bet our definitions would be totally different. We all have our own interpretation of what a center is, right?

Ashley's interpretation:

Some words get a bad wrap! I still believe what I said. You can do closed-type projects, but use open-ended words and visa versa. It all comes down to the fact that you have to do things that both you and the kids are interested in doing. There is more than one way to do things. You have to do what works for you, but words have power!

Brad's interpretation:

This story shows me that some change was beginning to occur in my understanding. I was beginning to rely on - or at least pay attention to - my own intuition. And I was beginning to listen to the kids! A teacher needs to be intuitive and to listen to the students.

Rachael's Interpretation:

Many things depend on your definition and these certainly differ among people. Each individual teacher needs to describe his or her own definition and to be true to it. It is possible to negotiate a joint definition, once you have agreed on the connotations. Everyone develops their own meanings.

Comment:

This recurring story is filled with dissension; however, it is positive in that no one responds with hostility during our disagreements. At times individual teachers display some defensiveness, a typical response when one feels uncertain about his or her ideas. Such conversations result in individual meaning making and personal theory building, even though we never achieve a negotiated consensus on the collective meaning of the terms.

This story also points to the essential nature of dialogue in the process of constructing one's reality. Dogmatic adherence to rigid definitions can be harmful during this process of coming to know. Until Ashley lets go of the notion of "centers as projects," she is unable to understand the principles underlying the Project Approach.

The Learning Process

Brad:

One learning concept that I've really acquired this year is "ownership." I'd be thinking, "I'm going to do this or that," and then I'd stop and think again. I'm getting to the point now where I'm saying to the kids, "This is what we've got to learn. Now how are we going to do it." Of course, I don't use those words, but you know what I mean. Last year, even though I was teaching grade six students, I took too much ownership. I would get out all the glue and materials out for every art project. This year I hardly do anything for these kids. They do all that themselves. I might show them what I want done, like how to stitch in a craft activity, and then - away they go. Whereas, last year, I was just going crazy teaching fifteen kids an art lesson of any kind. Yet, this way, I think the products are better. One of my colleagues saw their stitchery products and said, "Did you stitch those for the kids?" When I said that they did them all themselves, she was really surprised and amazed.

I find it interesting that sometimes kids pick up on things during field trips that you would never expect them to notice. And sometimes they just learn something that they are really interested in, and you had no plan for them to learn it. They just seem to know it all of a sudden. People think it's very efficient to plan a good lesson and teach it carefully and then do a worksheet afterward to see if the kids have learned the concept they were teaching. We often think this other kind of incidental learning is inefficient. And yet, when they've learned it this way, it's planted for good! For example, with the postal codes. The kids just know that all mail needs to have a postal code. But, if I had tried to teach the meaning of postal codes and then tested them two months later, some of them wouldn't have known. I think the key is interaction - the hands-on involvement, as they work with their own thoughts. If new ideas fit with their own previous experience, they discover new learnings and it just fits.

Brad's Interpretation:

This year makes last year look like I was overbearing with *my* planning and *my* insistence in having the kids do what *I* wanted them to do. My kids have made many choices this year. They are becoming independent learners at an early age. I know how learning takes place, but I often need to verbalize my knowledge and to remind myself of that knowledge. I think that effective and efficient learning experiences require the total commitment of both the teacher and the learner. While a teacher is responsible for the program, it is beneficial to include learner's in the planning, learning, and evaluating of the program.

Comment:

The above narrative is composed of two anecdotes demonstrating how Brad constructs his own theories about student learning. The first one deals with empowerment and grows from both his successful and unsuccessful experiences with project work and with other activities in which he encourages independent thinking and student initiative. He is proud of the accomplishments of his students and of the responsibility they demonstrate toward their learning. Such theory was originally an esoteric and abstract philosophical belief. Brad made it his own through personal exploration. The second personal theory Brad constructs is one in which he acknowledges that he always knew how learning took place; however, he comes to understand that experience is the key to unlocking this learning. This theory has the potential to guide his pedagogical practice in the future - students construct learning through hands-on experience with materials and ideas. He *creates a further theory as he recognizes that such experiences are the result of total engagement by the stakeholders.*

Summary

During the group sessions the teachers and I discussed topics that went beyond the immediate and specific concerns of project work to deal with fundamental underlying issues involved in the change process. Twenty-six stories were constructed from the transcripts and presented in conversational format in this chapter. These stories were arranged by topic using taxonomic analysis. The taxonomy was then displayed in a box diagram to assist in reading the chapter. The narratives were organized into nine topics which were then grouped under three general categories. These three sections addressed the ways in which the teachers planned for changing organizational structures, issues of congeniality and collegiality, and challenges and choices in the exploration of new pedagogical ideas.

As my readers entered into the lives of these teachers through the dialectic content in this chapter, I hope they will have discovered authentic individuals who reveal the essence of their humanness - warts and all. These teachers showed natural human inconsistency - sometimes passionate, often chaotic, usually sensitive, but seldom predictable. I trust that each reader may have also recognized the individuals as people they know in other bodies and thus had the opportunity to interpret the teachers' stories based on personal experience.

These stories could have been organized in many ways, as the topics, interpretations, and themes dance around, resurfacing in different ways in different conversations. The teachers' narratives celebrated dialectic experiences of individual and pedagogical meaning making, created through processes of both personal and group exploration, struggle, and reflection. By exploring the stories and anecdotes, we gain new insight into the meaning of change and professional learning in the ongoing development of the research participants' beliefs and practices, both in the creation of the teacher self and in the creation of this research story.

I presented four case studies of the research participants engaged in project work in Chapter VI. In this chapter, I extended the data to include additional conversational stories and anecdotes which demonstrate the dialectic nature of the meaning making process and also reveal deeper understanding about the ways in which these teachers reflect on existing practice and construct new pedagogical beliefs. Authenticity, empowerment, ambiguity tolerance, and insightfulness permeated these dialectic narratives and the interpretations following these stories. In subsequent chapters, the project work stories from Chapter VI and the dialogues that address issues beyond the Project Approach in Chapter VII will be analyzed in relation to these identified themes. As I discuss the themes in more depth in Chapter VIII, I will use both direct quotes and paraphrased content from the original transcripts, informal conversations, and journals of the research participants to support their development. These themes focus around the engagement of teachers in experiences of meaningful professional learning whereby pedagogical experiments can become an integral part of the teacher's belief system and practice.

CHAPTER VIII

TEACHERS ENGAGING IN MEANINGFUL LEARNING

> Incarnated in a great teacher, great ideas become pure energy and love - the teacher acts and lives the ideas; they are his being. The teacher *is* his knowledge.
>
> Jacob Needleman, 1986, p. 42

Introduction

In The Heart of Philosophy, Needleman (1986) laments the fact that great ideas do not change people in meaningful ways and examines the process through which he believes people can be profoundly affected by personal exploration into the fundamental questions of life. Needleman says we are caught up in a "world of appearances" in which we see reality as it seems to be instead of how it really is. In order to make meaning of one's life in a deep and significant way, he says we need to go beyond this superficiality, to throw our existing views into question and, in so doing, to see the difference between the way things appear on the surface and what the individual recognizes as the potential of great ideas. Needleman uses the term "self-interrogation" to refer to this personal investigation into the "real world of self-inquiry." Therefore, in order for a person to truly change, he or she must have the courage, the patience, the persistence to personally address the ambiguities surrounding the troublesome issues of everyday life, becoming deeply engrossed in a struggle to understand the real problems in question. Needleman says "we cannot solve our problems without the development of a new power of mind within ourselves" (p. 162). Therefore, he believes a person must access the power of a higher intelligence which lies not in one's ability to know, but in his or her ability to ask. "Behind the problem, lies the Question" (p. 18). So, Brad asks the Question: "Will I change?"

The evolution of the four research participants as they participate in this complex and diverse professional learning experience is the focus of this chapter. I explore the meaning of their experiences as each one faces the crises, problems, and promises of the everyday teaching and learning situations which comprise his or her world of appearances. These distortions of reality include such things as equating "quietness" with "attentiveness" or "test scores" with "real learning." I attempt to look behind these appearances into the actual life of the classroom and into the minds of the teachers as they grapple with educational realities through a process of self-interrogation. However, in so doing, I also attempt to explore the meaning teachers make of personal and pedagogical changes as I struggle, along with the research participants, with the fundamental research question: How do new pedagogical practices move from fleeting, superficially implemented experiments to become an integral part of the teacher's belief system and practice?

Behind this fundamental question is another, even more basic one, in which individuals struggle with the meaning of learning in its most significant sense as they bring life to the classroom. If teachers desire profound pedagogical change, they must become engrossed in a quest to understand the meaning of problematic situations - interacting passionately with ideas to create the personal meaning that results in enduring change that can powerfully affect the essence of the teacher, as person. In order for such genuine change to occur, Needleman believes that teachers must feel personally affected by what the ideas suggest, as do students when they too are engaged in similar authentic learning experiences.

With Needleman's basic philosophy underlying the development of this chapter, I expand upon the four themes to explore the ideas of developing teachers and the meaning of change through professional learning. These themes are centered around the concepts of authenticity, empowerment, ambiguity tolerance, and insightfulness. They suggest that genuine change is created through active engagement in a holistic experience of hearing, seeing, thinking, doing, feeling, and being. I begin the discussion of each theme with an anecdote that I believe captures the essence of the theme in question. Through an analysis of the descriptive and interpretive data supporting each of the four themes, I arrive at a deeper understanding of the ways in which these teachers develop as they deal with the issues. As they search for both questions and answers which can inform their practice, they are also trying to clarify their beliefs about the ways in which optimum teaching and learning takes place. They are teachers struggling to integrate beliefs and practices - striving to become their new knowledge.

Authenticity

> **Last night I stayed up until three o'clock in the morning writing individual letters to each of my students to hand out on the last day of school. They were thrilled when they each got their special letter. Teddy came up to me and said, "I have something for you, too." He gave me a great big hug! Those are the real gifts that make teaching worthwhile.**
>
> **Rachael, June, 1993**

Within the context of this study I state that enduring or genuine change is change that profoundly affects the person's belief system and practice, creating self through the process. In proposing that such change can be constructed by authentic individuals, then I must ask what it means for individuals to be "authentic?" In a further explanation of the definition, Webster's Dictionary explains that to be "authentic" is to be actually and exactly what is claimed, implying that to be truly trustworthy one must act in accordance with that actuality. For example, the opening anecdote by Rachael shows an authentic individual who demonstrates what she values by what she says and what she does, thereby also revealing who she is as a person. All four research participants demonstrate their authenticity as they come to the study, not for the sole purpose of assisting me in my doctoral work, but for their own purposes. They are primarily motivated, not by my needs, but by their own personal desires and real questions. Each of these teachers reveals his or her authentic self in many ways throughout the study.

During the first months of the study, Rachael authentically lays herself open to frustration and honestly demonstrates the raw passion of self-despair. She now looks back on this time with some embarrassment and changed perceptions. In re-examining these frustrations, Rachael reflects, "I felt used, abused and pushed around by the system ... but my perceptions have changed and I'm not so upset." She sees no need to be firmly stalwart and blindly accepting, but instead genuinely expresses changing attitudes and changing feelings. In commenting about the resentment that she earlier expressed regarding local innovative schools, she says, "That sounds like sour grapes to me." But she also genuinely admits, in her most recent comments, that she gets frustrated when people's attitudes differ radically from hers and also says, "It's important for me to be right," indicating that she is well aware of "who she is" and "what she believes in."

Brad searches for "a better way," one more consistent with his deep and abiding belief that "children need to feel good about themselves as learners." However, he also reveals the natural inconsistencies of an authentic person as he says one thing and demonstrates another; he claims a dislike for reading theoretical information, but chooses to reflect on a theory of change. Ashley openly expresses the continuing challenges of living up to her high standard of what it means to to be "the best teacher that I can be" and strives to "become a better teacher" through the information she receives during professional development activities.

In spite of the fact that enduring change does not occur for Marie at this time, she also reveals herself as an authentic being. She recognizes that she is too busy to continue in the study, but she also expresses another concern - very real to her in reference to her personal teaching experiences. Marie worries that children may not "make good use of their time" if she follows the Project Approach, and thus is compelled to use the approach no longer than it takes to see if it works for her. She is true both to herself and to her belief system when she withdraws from the research study.

Rather than portraying the feigned composure that covers true inner feelings, the research narratives demonstrate poignant expressions of the teachers' authentic emotion. They respond to and interact with life's situations and to each other with passion, passion that is an important element in the construction of new meaning. Ashley expresses her fears of being a first year teacher, as she says, "I shut up and backed off." Brad and Ashley each express trepidation when they take risks to present divergent timetables to administrators who may reject their ideas. They also express honest amazement and pride when their voices are heard. Both Rachael and Brad tell about times when they had to "swallow some pride," implying underlying feelings of humiliation and indignity, along with the inevitable resignation. Ashley repeatedly introduces the topic of "government exams;" her preoccupation with external accountability and her worry over the potential failures of students indicates her anxiety that the scores may reflect negatively on her. She also responds with anger and resentment to the lack of financial support for professional development activities and for desired new textbooks. But there is also joy and exhilaration, as when the teachers tell stories about making puppets or painting castles or designing stamps with the children.

Needleman (1986) presents another view of authenticity. He sees it as the power to see self through the faculty of real attention and real self-confrontation, which he also refers to as self-interrogation - an inner struggle involving a form of self-questioning which seeks to inspire in the individual a sense of wonder or a love of being. This quest is a striving for a state in which real ideas "penetrate into one's flesh and blood, as well as one's mind" (p. 51). Brad puts this perspective into practical terms as he expresses a similar perspective in one of his interpretive theme statements: "Effective and efficient learning experiences require the total commitment of both the teacher and the learner." Needleman also suggests that such authentic self-attention is a never-ending process through which one creates the authenticity that opens up possibilities for genuine change through continual self-searching. As Brad says, "True change has to come from within." and through his life he will inevitably develop deeper understandings of the issues in question as he continues to question his pedagogy and his ideas.

Brad displays a sense of wonder many times throughout his search. When he discovers "lip poppers" in the ADD program, he excitedly relates his wonder and amazement at these new pre-phonetic ideas. On the surface perhaps this represents nothing but the discovery of an insignificant piece of trivia, but perhaps it also demonstrates Brad's authentic exploration of an idea that genuinely intrigues him. Marie's cynical response does not deflate Brad and he expresses an authentic revelation, when he says, "But I never knew that the MMM sound came out of my nose." While he goes on to think through the process and to come to a genuine and rationale decision about the way in which the program can be best used with students, his initial sense of wonder is also authentic. In a similar fashion, Rachael enthusiastically interjects pieces of information that reveal her sense of wonder in the world of bears and butterflies, refusing to give up her project on bears because it is meaningful to both her and her students. These, too, are acts of authenticity.

This need to know is recognized by Brad when he states: "We need to want to learn before we do learn," when he refers to teachers' professional learning experiences. It is also demonstrated by Rachael as she presents her inner struggle in terms of her very real desire to "prove" that she has "covered the curriculum" and her competing desire to remain flexible and open to the children's need to investigate sewers and garage doors and to "leave resources on the shelf" if they do not fit with what she's teaching. She passionately responds to her internal need to "be accountable," well aware that there is also external accountability; however, Rachael also enthusiastically reports her accomplishments as she finds her own way to schedule and plan effective learning experiences within the existing curricular context.

Instead of assuming a false bravado, Brad grapples with the question of his own competence as he wonders if new methods will allow students to read and write as well as the traditional teaching strategies previously used by Peggy. In this case, whether or not there is a provable correlation between various methodologies and student success is irrelevant; school mythology prevails, suggesting that "traditional is effective." Under these conditions, it takes real courage for Brad to persist in his exploration. In trying to unload the institutional baggage, Brad faces collegial criticism; for example, he admits that "Peggy gets upset" when she observes that he is changing his seating arrangement - again! Such subtle messages mitigate against change and are a powerful challenge to one's authenticity; however, they do not discourage Brad. As I previously suggested, perhaps Ashley is also able to more authentically respond to project work and to deal with the issues more honestly when she is freed from the influence of Marie, who finds the approach ineffective. Both Brad and Ashley persevere in his or her own "inner struggle" toward more effective learning for students.

However, when Ashley was unable to maintain the self-interrogation without outside facilitation, she provided me with a candid explanation of her situation and of her feelings. She says that the children are too boisterous and noisy; the planning is too hard; and she lacks the time and energy because of conflicting priorities. I see these frustrations as authentic cries for help. During the research group sessions, Ashley often independently expresses different opinions from those of her colleagues, doing so in confidence that she is in a safe and supportive environment in which she is free to "be real." When she is left to her own devices, she is not able to sustain project work. I suggest that one of the reasons may be the removal of the project work support system, without replacing it with another caring community. She affirms my feelings that she desires to belong to a caring collegial group when she directly states: "Teachers need support."

Rachael expresses a similar feeling, as she laments the absence of a "kindred spirit" on her school staff and Brad, on many occasions, talks about the supportive relationships that he has with school colleagues Peggy, Melissa, and Ron. Brad also provides a revelation of his essence when he reports a sense of failure during the project on school. He analyzes these feelings by revealing the sense of guilt that he feels in using Peggy's plans and says that she may not be getting all the "glory" she deserves. His feelings appear to be motivated by a genuine caring for Peggy's well-being.

The research group also demonstrates genuine caring for one another - perhaps surprising in that they do not meet often during the study. In interpreting the story, Sharing Memorable Experiences, Brad suggests that "We are sharing ourselves with another," implying that the collegiality goes deeper than superficial sharing of pedagogical information. Beck (1992, pp. 462-470) presents the three basic acts of caring as receiving the perspective of the other, responding to the awareness that comes from that reception, and remaining in the caring relationship for an appropriate length of time. As I reflect on our interactions, I see that we do authentically receive one another's perspectives, as we also attempt to respond to one another in caring ways. Whenever one of the teachers expresses problems and concerns, the individual is heard and given an empathetic response. However, I do not believe that we remained in the caring relationship for the time that is needed to effect real change in all the individuals who were involved, as time and distance prevented the continuance of the group upon the completion of the study.

Another aspect of authenticity is a genuine caring for oneself. This does not mean self-aggrandizement, but appreciating and accepting that I have strengths, weaknesses, and needs, just like everyone else, and appropriately disclosing these feelings in a climate of trust. This is the case as Marie leaves the study, confident that we will understand her need to do so. When Brad is unable to attend the January session, he expresses his apologies to the group, but remains faithful to his prior commitments. As we collaborate to set times for our group meetings, the individuals assertively present their needs as we search for an evening or a Saturday that is convenient for all. Just as there is no passive acceptance, there is also no aggressiveness as each person expresses personal understandings that are often different from those of others. As well in conversations about assessment and planning strategies, Rachael shows that she has more experience and expertise than her colleagues; nevertheless, she still expresses her opinions without reservation at the time, albeit with some later second thought and self-doubt.

An appropriate motto to represent the engagement of the research participants in this study may be Shakespeare's words: "To thine own self be true." This type of authenticity is an important theme in my research findings. The teachers are true to their beliefs and values, and thus to themselves. Authenticity is an essential element of change, but it is also possible for one to be authentic without changing existing beliefs, values, and practices. However, enduring change is not possible without authenticity. Individuals do not demonstrate real change if they live with pretense; instead lasting change requires commitment to the ideas in question and to one's own personal struggle. Those who adopt change to please others, to conform to mandated edicts, to receive tangible benefits, or to avoid conflict, may be meeting the immediate challenges of the work place, but not addressing the challenges of the inner self. While it is true that imposed change may result in experimentation that ultimately becomes part of who you are as a person, individuals are unlikely to adopt enduring and substantive change if they attempt to change, for reasons other than those that reflect true, personal authenticity.

Empowerment

> **There was a great deal of controversy over whether or not a garbage dump site should be build in the community to deal with the garbage from a large city. We studied it a bit, but the children were still confused over the conflicting information. So I took them to a community hearing. After returning the kids came up with an idea for a class debate and did lots of research on all the issues. Initially they had all voted "yes" in response to the ideas of most of their parents; after studying conservation issues, the class were all against it; however, after hearing the dynamic presenter at the hearing, they were totally convinced that it was great idea. But, after more research and the debate, the kids were really well informed and the vote showed almost an even split. It showed me, once again, that when you give kids control over their own learning, they just take off with it.**
>
> **Brad, June, 1993**

This theme emerges from the research participants' ongoing need to make meaning of their responsibilities and opportunities as "teachers" in the classroom. They struggle with issues of power and control, trying to understand what it means to share power - to empower students while not rendering oneself powerless. As they seek to respond to the call of the students, they become increasingly aware that hearing is different from listening, and they strive to open themselves up to other voices, while not diminishing their own voice. I sense that this is a struggle still very much in progress. It may well be a life long theme for these teachers as they deal with such issues within a constantly changing power structure. In the words of Boomer & Torr (1987): "We never are powerful; we are forever becoming" (p. 15).

I have used the term "empowerment" to explore the concept of "becoming powerful". It may appear that the use of this word trivalizes the concepts that I am pursuing in this theme. Indeed, empowerment is an overused term in contemporary educational literature, often deemed "educational jargon" by both academics and practitioners. Gordon (1992) deals with this problematic issue stating:

> There are two possible courses of action a writer who wants to discuss powerful concepts can take when the language symbolizing those concepts has been abused. One is to use different words that mean essentially the same thing as the original terms (for example, using the word *enablement* in place of *empowerment*). The other is to attempt to revive the original terms by reintroducing them along with a discussion of what the writer considers to be their authentic meaning and appropriate use. (p. 62)

I have chosen the latter for same two reasons that are identified by Gordon. First, by abandoning the word "empowerment" I would be also abandoning the rich literature, educative dialogue, and positive action that is associated with the term. In addition, the words that one substitutes to describe the same concepts are subject to the same misuse as the original terms if they too become popular. Thus I will discuss the concept of empowerment as a dominant theme in my research study, and will also address the related issues of powerfulness and powerlessness.

The opening anecdote demonstrates the empowerment of individuals and highlights the importance of listening to multiple voices in the process of becoming powerful. During the study the research participants were continually faced with many divergent voices, both in the communities in which they worked and throughout the research study. Brad's anecdote is particularly meaningful as it shows the power of the spoken word in many ways. He encouraged his students to listen carefully to their own voices, as well as to listen critically to many other powerful voices. Brad also demonstrates that he can listen to student, research and community voices, and is able to provide opportunities for the students to come to terms with the issues through personal experience. In the words of Brad, "When you give the kids control over their own learning, they just take off with it." This empowerment is based on Brad's ability to listen to multiple voices.

Listening involves opening myself up to the other, allowing me to be vulnerable while focusing on the voice of the other. It also involves thoughtfully responding to this voice in such a way as to show my commitment to his or her needs, interests, and ideas, as well as the individual's very being and becoming. When power is understood from the common sense perspective of "control over," then such a listening stance may imply losses and gains of power at the expense of self or others. This is not the case if I subscribe to Boomer & Torr's perspective on power in which they see it as a benign force, emerging from equal and effective interactions between people. They state:

> Acting powerfully means being effective, influencing others through how we behave, seeking to ensure that we do not take power away from another, contributing to giving power to others in whatever way is possible without patronizing, deciding our own directions, and determining for ourselves the limits to our actions (within external constraints). It is simultaneously an internal sense of self *and* a set of social actions in the world. (p. 14)

This perspective is not commonly understood in the hierarchical structure of the traditional school climate; therefore the Project Approach, with its emphasis on the active involvement of students in all facets of their learning, is an unsettling principle to these teachers and they struggle with this concept. Brad says, "We have different rules for ourselves than we do for our students" and Rachael says of her day plan, "If it's in pen, it's not negotiable," recognizing the problematic in making decisions about learning experiences. Ashley repeatedly worries about losing control over her students by giving over power to them; thus, she makes rules and uses "behavior management" strategies to control their actions.

Jones (1986) presents an interesting classification of the use of power as *power on*, *power for*, and *power with*. She believes that the ideal classroom scenario is one is which power is shared, thus "power with" the children in a democratic environment. The teachers are aware of this ideal and are striving to achieve shared power. While this concept is typically known in contemporary literature as "empowerment," Brad refers to it as "ownership" and says he believes that "individuals should be involved in the planning, learning, and evaluation of the program." He says that he became acutely aware of how such involvement can be practiced as he initially experimented with project work, but he feels that he has made more progress toward this end during this present year.

Greenberg (1992) says "the essence of democracy is inclusiveness in which everyone is recognized, utilized, and rewarded" (p. 54). Rachael is actively exploring what it means to have a democratic classroom and presents a continually shifting vision of appropriate power structures to effect optimum learning within a community of learners. At one point, she says that she is "relinquishing the reins of power - reluctantly!" Rachael organizes furniture, arranges materials, puts up children's work, and tours the rooms of her colleagues, concluding, "My room definitely looks more kid-friendly," but also recognizes the complexity of the issues when she says "Just because my name is on the door in the biggest letters shouldn't necessarily give me the biggest voice." She seems to feel the responsibility of the power vested in her, simply by virtue of her "teacher role" and all that this position implies.

Although Ashley recognizes the importance of negotiating learning activities, she continues to use "power on" strategies. She says pragmatically that she no longer provides opportunities for her students to suggest center ideas as she did last year, and that she still has the "rule about arts and crafts" during center time. However, during the study Ashley develops new "power for" strategies that allow her to give some control to the students. She sets up learning centers and plans open-ended learning activities which provide opportunities for her students to paint, to write creative stories, to make puppets, to compose songs, and to perform them in front of the class. As well, she moves to a place where she begins to use "power with" the students when she provides opportunities for them to have an active voice during the memory phase of the animal project; however, Ashley's present state of mind is best represented by her statement: "Giving the children freedom is hard sometimes." In breaking away from traditional teacher directed, "power on" instruction, perhaps teachers need to experiment with teaching strategies in which they use "power for" students, before they can effectively use power with the children in more democratic ways. "Power for" may be a necessary step in the process, but one in which teachers can stagnate if they no longer continue to explore new frontiers with their students.

Brad uses "power on" as he gives the children a worksheet so he has "time to think." On another occasion he ironically states that he continued instructing a lesson on nutrition even though "they seemed to know almost everything that I was teaching them about nutrition before I taught it." Perhaps one of Brad's strengths is that he is keenly aware of these behaviors as divergent from the ideal to which he aspires. He also uses the "power for" approach as he plans a nutrition theme with "lots of interesting activities" and a "learning filled day" of St. Patrick's Day activities that the students "went crazy over;" however, he also recognizes where the power lies in these learning experiences and sees them as valuable, but different, from the post office, the school, and the home projects in which the children have active voices in their own learning. In discussing teaching methods involving shared power, de Vries (1988) states: "We cannot know ahead of time exactly what a constructivist program will be because this depends on what children contribute, as well as what talented teachers contribute" (p. 17). Brad acknowledges this dilemma as he says, "It's scary, isn't it?"; however, he perseveres in this awesome task and feels that he has made progress toward meeting his goal of increased student ownership.

As Rachael strives for classroom democracy, she too is keenly aware of how she pragmatically uses power. She contemplates her rights and responsibilities in the classroom, as well as those of her students, trying to find a balance which will result in personal satisfaction with an appropriate use of power, an attitude toward power in which the child and the adult are not artificially separated and the child is seen as "neither absolute other nor as exactly the same as ourselves" (Silin, 1993, p. 227). Silin says that teachers need to look for *continuities* which "can only come from assuming the centrality of preconceptual knowledge, knowledge that is neither objective nor subjective, but that emerges through direct participation in the world" (p.

227). He continues by postulating that this knowledge allows teachers "to know both the child in the class and the child in you."

Both Rachael and Brad seem to be searching for this knowledge, as they participate with children in neighborhood walks, appreciating their shared excitement and learning in the ordinary experiences of everyday life. Rachael revels with the children in their fascination with the hoar frost and their interested in "bear trivia" and Brad says that this year he doesn't worry about the school interruptions anymore, because "I just enjoy being with the kids." As teachers interact and share power with children, they construct knowledge about themselves and about their students. Silin says that this is the type of knowledge that allows us to "access the questions that really matter" (p. 227) and I think Rachael is well aware of this when she states " Knowledge is powerful" and asks a rhetorical question, "Who has the right to share it?"

As well as listening to the multiple voices of the students, these teachers listen to other voices and begin to question the legitimate power of parents, educational administrators, colleagues, and curriculum designers. All the teachers feel that traditional reporting systems are not congruent with the continuous and experiential forms of education with which they are experimenting. Marie notes the incongruence between project work and parent expectations and all the teachers feel curricular demands supported by traditional parents are interfering with what they want to do in their classrooms. Ashley also walks out of a session at the teacher's convention when the voice she hears does not meet her expectations. Rachael believes the organizational structures set up by her principal are restrictive; she is unhappy with the overbearing voice of the school librarian. Marie questions administrative male dominance and Brad challenges traditional community gender roles when he asks to teach grade one in his school. In addition, Brad listens to his colleagues' criticisms of project work, but silences these voices when he shows that the approach is effective with his students.

The silence of apathy, indifference, and powerlessness can inhibit change, but these teachers did more than listen - they typically responded in positive ways to have their voices heard. Greenberg (1992) says that adults learn the same way that children do. Learning for both adults and children is the "art of acquiring more - or more *accurate* - knowledge, understanding and wisdom through the self-initiated experiences of solving a problem encountered when engaged in meaningful activity" (p. 67). The teachers are engaged in such learning alongside their students during the research study. They actively explore the use of personal power outside the classroom, just as they share control with their students in the construction of their learning experiences within the classroom.

Ashley, Brad and Rachael all solve problems between themselves and their administrators, as they begin to see ways in which they can remain accountable to the official curriculum, while still allowing room for children's voices. Brad demonstrates to both the school and parent communities that a "guy can teach grade one" and that the children will learn to read and write using experiential learning, in combination with systematic instruction. Ashley shows the principal that the Project Approach can be effective and he later acknowledges her voice in a congratulatory letter.

Brad and Rachael also find their voices with colleagues and within the community at large. Brad shares experiential learning activities with several teachers in the school and Rachael begins to have some influence on her colleagues by modelling a different method of making puppets. This year, Rachael presented a workshop on alternate forms of planning, using both personal experiences from her own classroom and other planning methods.

Brad's teaching approaches are gaining approval from both colleagues and parents. After parents approached the school board with accolades about his teaching methods this past month, he was featured in the local newspaper. Through such experiences teachers gain collective power. Boomer & Torr (1987) believe that "united teachers are more resilient, more resourceful, more insistent, more strategically capable and, most of all, more successful" (p. 6). I think the research study may have helped these teachers to develop a powerful collective voice that can continue to influence local education in positive ways.

In order to empower self, as well as to provide opportunities for student empowerment, it is necessary to listen empathetically to the other. To achieve these goals, Noddings (1984) believes that there is a need for genuine caring in which "I must see the other's reality as a possibility for my own" (p. 14). Brad recognizes Nodding's view of caring when he relates the anecdote about children being so engrossed in their work that they didn't want to go home at the end of the school day. He says that the students must have felt like he did when his mother called him from play to come in for supper. Rachael provides regular dictionaries for student use and then celebrates with the child who is amazed that she allows him to use adult books. Because of her passion for books, perhaps she puts herself in his place, thinking about the personal joy of using books that may have been unavailable to her. Ashley empathetically recognizes and responds to the child who got up and sang a song after speaking very little the previous year. She seems to envision what that challenge must be like for the child. These teachers demonstrate a commitment to caring.

Other writers (Gilligan, 1982; Covey, 1989) refer to related concepts using the term "interdependence." Gilligan states: "When assertion no longer seems dangerous, the concept of relationships changes from a bond of continuing dependence to a dynamic of interdependence" (p. 149). She says this involves a "consciousness of the dynamics of human relationships" which "joins the heart and the eye in an ethic that ties the activity of thought to the activity of care" (p. 149). Covey believes that "maturity" is a process of moving from dependence to independence to interdependence, a relationship in which individuals have the self confidence to make independent decisions while still valuing and growing from their relationships with others. Belenky et al. (1986) see this process as moving beyond the construction of personal and procedural knowledge to the construction of knowledge based on the integration of multiple voices.

These concepts are helpful in making meaning of the learning experiences of the research participants. I think Ashley shows genuine caring as she explores sharing power with her students during project work, accepting the learning possibilities of the students during the "knights, dragons, and castles" project and admitting that "sometimes our preconceptions blind us to other possibilities." However, while she recognizes that she thinks differently than does Rachael, she is still not able to suspend personal judgment and to see Rachael's possible connections for the project. Ashley struggles with issues of control further support the hypothesis that she makes sense of information based on her own personal construction of knowledge. Similarly, she interprets staff meetings only from a personal perspective, saying that they are "a waste of time" and that she can see no purpose in them. Such attitudes and behaviors may suggest that she typically acts independently within Belenky's stage of "personal knowledge," trusting primarily in her own voice based on her own experiences.

Listening to multiple voices in an interdependent way does not mean giving up one's voice. All the teachers demonstrate their independence with stories in which they "do it my way;" however, both Brad and Rachael make strides toward developing interdependent learning communities in which they constructively share power with students. This means growing beyond both dependence on the knowledge of others and a firm adherence to personal knowledge, to a place where I am not threatened by the knowledge of others, but can use it effectively in the construction of new knowledge in an interdependent way. Brad states: "My program is not always best - we need to focus on our program." Brad also works interdependently with Peggy as he learns about teaching grade one, integrating her voice with that of Dr. Chard's as he explores the Project Approach and then uses these experiences to empower his grade three students. Rachael is striving to develop interdependent school communities, both within her classroom and within the school, as she does her masters project next year. While she has made progress with her students toward this end in the past two years, she may only achieve this goal with her colleagues after she is able to see the other teachers' realities as a possibility for herself and to begin to understand what changes will mean to the development of each individual teacher in such an interdependent collegial community.

The teachers are struggling to hear multiple voices and, in so doing, to positively impact the quality of life for students, parents, colleagues and for themselves - to pro-actively foster a life of quality within interdependent communities that support student learning. There is a need to break down traditional power structures which promote the adversarial roles of students versus teachers and to look at a redistribution of power in which all individuals live together in caring and mutually supportive environments.

Perhaps the research participants are unconsciously recognizing this mission in their use of terminology when they talk about their students. When they continually use the terms "kids" or "children," instead of the more formal term, "students," perhaps they are also giving voice to their relationship with their students as persons. As well, they use real names of real people when they relate classroom anecdotes, very much aware of the children's unique personalities. Such a de-centering of the "teacher - student structure" may allow for more interactive learning communities; however, empowerment of teachers also demands great courage from administrators who traditionally hold power and from those who are striving to have their voices heard.

I believe that my research study shows that teachers do not change in profound ways unless they are empowered to do so. Teachers not only need to be given the freedom to act, but they must **feel** powerful in order to demonstrate attitudes and acts of both personal independence and interdependent caring. Enduring change does not occur when power rests with only one side of the equation. Synergistic accomplishments are the result of shared power, when individuals seek first to listen and to understand and then to pro-actively and assertively use power for the good of the other, while not denying personal goals and aspirations. Such interdependent action can produce genuine change when individuals effectively listen to multiple voices.

Ambiguity Tolerance

> **One thing that I'm really having trouble with is the group work in Phase II of the Project Approach. I have six research groups going in my room at once. Quite often they all want my attention and need my help. Sometimes I can't get to each group during the class period. After class, I don't even know what they**

did that period. They seem to need so much guidance and I don't know how to handle it.

Marie, November, 1992

During the time teachers are experimenting with the Project Approach, they often deal with difficult problems, like the one above described by Marie. It is frustrating when one feels overwhelmed with competing demands. Marie is experiencing conflict between her role as teacher and her conception of group work for the students. Difficulties in dealing with problematic situations and confusion over conflicting values can result in a return to prior teaching strategies that seem more effective than the ones under exploration. Marie seems unable to handle the ambiguity that results from her uncertainty with group work during project time.

Buchmann & Floden (1992) state: "We know that significant change often comes through adventure - through running up against the unexpected, chancing upon things that are conflicting or that are memorable, but mysterious. I don't think learners are well served by having all the paths laid down for them" (p. 5). Therefore, they are challenging those involved in change processes to be open to surprises, discoveries, and uncertainties. Ashley, Brad, and Rachael delight in discovering the learning value of encouraging the children to do sketching during field trips. Rachael is excited with the development of a project on time and of the children's intense engagement in the topic, as they even time how many minutes late she is after recess. Brad comments that the intensity was exhilarating when the children drew their homes from memory, and wonders, in admiration of these engaged children, how many students around the world would work so hard on one thing for so long. Perhaps teachers are most effective when they open themselves to the possibilities and tolerate the ambiguity of not being able to predict with certainty the results of their actions.

Bateson (1990) says that the lives we create are compostions and that the compositions we create during times of change "are filled with interlocking messages of our commitments and decisions. Each one is a message of possiblity" (p. 241). It would appear that the teachers who are able to explore many possibilities, as opposed to those who definitively present the "one right reality," may eventually be more effective in personalizing innovative ideas and in adopting change. But there is also risk involved when dealing with ambiguous issues and with risk comes the inevitability of making mistakes. As Brad considers the possibility of setting up a woodworking area in his classroom, he considers all the possible problems, weighs the issues, and finally decides that this may be a worthwhile activity. However, the story shows only his intent and, before carrying out the project, he struggles privately with the issue in more depth, willing to live in the tension created by his confusion and then to risk potential failure because he believes in what he is doing. Brad states that "you have to think your way through insecurity" and he demonstrates that he can grow through the process.

Conversely, Ashley and Marie are not always willing to deal with such conflicting and uncertain possibilities. Ashley may have made a more informed decision if she had been able to be more tolerant to the ambiguities of retention for Matthew. As well, she emphatically replies that she does not want to try group sizes of three when Rachael suggests that this may be a more effective possibility. Such risks present discontinuity and dis-ease and Ashley expresses this uneasiness when she states that she is uncomfortable with new ideas, thereby rejecting the relevance of discontinuity during her exploration. On the other hand, Brad reluctantly plunges into project work, uncertain of procedures, unsure of the outcomes, concerned about collegial criticism, but willing to deal with the potential discontinuity brought on by his actions.

Pajares (1992) states: "Beliefs are unlikely to be replaced unless they [new beliefs] prove satisfactory and they are unlikely to prove satisfactory unless they are challenged and one is able to assimilate them into existing conceptions" (p. 321). Marie finds it unbearable to deal with the open-endedness of project work during a time in her life when she is also faced with personal stress and confusion over educational priorities and practices. She is unwilling to challenge her notion of field trips and cannot see any potential in the suggestions that I present to her as possible solutions to her perceived problems with transportation. Ashley predicts that the Project Approach would be too difficult with her present group of students, unwilling to continue challenging her newly developing exploration with another pedagogical method. Without challenge, it seems impossible for these teachers to develop enduring changes in practices and beliefs.

Cuban (1992) distinguishes between problems and dilemmas. He sees problems as "fairly routine, structured situations that produce some level of conflict because a desired goal is blocked," while dilemmas are "conflict-filled situations that require choices because competing, highly prized values cannot be fully satisfied" (p. 6). He continues by saying that "dilemmas look like problems. They even feel like problems (conflict is common to both), but they are far messier, less structured, and often intractable to routine solutions" (p. 6). Many of the teacher's stories fall within Cuban's definition of dilemmas, but the narratives under the heading in the previous chapter, **Ethical and Moral Issues**, all vividly demonstrate the complex situations and competing values facing teachers when they look more deeply into the workings of the common sense world of the classroom.

Brad struggles with the uncertainty of distinguishing a "project" from a "unit," as well as the possible impact of his understanding on the learning of his students. All the teachers try to sort out their personal definitions of a learning "center" based on their existing belief systems, and Ashley astutely recognizes that "it depends on your vision." Rachael and Marie struggle with the most appropriate school structures for children with special needs. While Marie strongly feels such students "shouldn't be forced on teachers," Rachael questions the relevance of "being pulled out" into resource room situations versus "being dumped" in regular classrooms.

There are no easy solutions to such dilemmas. The multiple meanings underlying various approaches for students with special needs is discussed in the story, What is educational equality? The dilemmas involved in setting up a democratic classroom appear in this story, as well. Moral and ethical issues underlie the stories What is teaching? and What is learning? Brad also deals with confusing ethical issues as he questions whether or not he is earning his salary and copes with "not teaching" during the teacher's strike. In an interpretation of the story on struggling with evaluation issues, Rachael states, "Knowledge is powerful. Who has the right to share it?" Rachael's concern demonstrates that the ambiguous and challenging nature of questions which arise from these educational dilemmas.

Cuban recognizes that dilemmas involve choices, often moral ones. "They end up with good-enough compromises, not neat solutions. We 'satisfice' when we cope with dilemmas. That is, in order to satisfy, we must sacrifice" (p. 7). As we "satisfice", he believes that we are not solving problems, but that we are "managing recurring dilemmas'. Rachael deals with the principal by telling him that the open block of time is for "centers," a word he can understand, instead of trying to convert him to her way of thinking as a means of solving the problem. Both Rachael and Ashley use "sign up sheets" as a way of coping with the dilemma involved in free choice versus teacher control. Ashley makes rules to deal with similar issues. In struggling with evaluation and retention, Rachael questions whether or not children's grades are relevant and says, "It's not the right question, but it's the one we all need to ask."

Buchmann & Floden (1992) contrast "coherence" with "consistency" and say there is a place for both notions in the change process. While they see consistency as a form of logical relations and an absence of contradictions, they propose that "coherence allows for many kinds of connectedness, including associations of ideas and feelings, imitations of resemblance, conflicts and tensions, and imaginative leaps. Coherence - not consistency - is hospitable to change and imagination, while true to many facets of concepts and experiences" (p. 4). From this perspective, the Project Approach provides the consistency to simulate a collaborative effort among teachers; however, the teachers who used the approach most effectively were able to employ the coherence required to deal with the resulting confusing issues in a personal way, within the context of their individual settings. Form and consistency, along with flexibility and coherence, are important and interdependent notions, but they also increase the ambiguity of teachers as they explore pedagogical changes.

Educational coherence is found where teachers "can discover and establish relations among various areas of sensibility, knowledge, and skill, yet where loose ends remain, inviting a reweaving of beliefs and ties to the unknown" (p. 4). Brad allows his plans for a hospital project to be subsumed by the student's passion for drawing their houses and is able to change direction while still maintaining a coherent perspective toward their learning. Rachael creatively organizes a timetable which allows her to remain accountable to the curriculum while still maintaining a flexible response to the children's needs and interests. As Ashley struggles with a variety of groupings in her classroom, she lacks both a consistent rationale for her actions, and a coherent view of probable outcomes connected to possible alternatives. Similarly, Marie participates in many professional learning programs and activities but does not articulate either a consistent or a coherent philosophy guiding her motives for pedagogical change.

Bateson (1990) states: "The central task of education today is not to confirm what is but to equip young men and women to meet change and to imagine what could be" (p. 74). In order to cope with the uncertainties of change, we must be open to many often conflicting possibilities and to live with the confusion of not knowing definitively which may be the most effective alternative to solve the problems or to manage the dilemmas of everyday life. Consistency is not as important as is coherence to positive change. When adopting this flexible perspective, I realize that making firm decisions, quickly and efficiently, may not be as conducive to change as is active exploration of many potential outcomes, as well as thoughtful deliberation of all possibilities over time. Rachael pragmatically sums up this theme as she says, "Change does not come easily. The struggles can stop the process. It's important to hang in." I can allow these struggles to impede my changing beliefs or I can handle the resulting confusions in positive ways that will support my changing beliefs. "Hanging in" may be the common sense version of "ambiguity tolerance."

Insightfulness

> **I read the story, Seeking the Light, and thought more about Ashley's implication that her students would consider the Fisher Price Castle a "baby toy." I realized that, as an adult, I find pleasure in all kinds of toys, so why wouldn't kids in grade three enjoy similar play? As adults play with children's toys, they are actively entering into the world of the child and such explorations can be mutually rewarding.**
>
> **Rachael, June, 1993**

Eisner (1985b) considers teaching to be an art and says that effective teachers develop satisfaction from what they do. He states that "the human need for pride in craftsmanship and being able to put something of oneself into work is recognized even by companies that sell packaged cake mixes" and "the need to get something out of what one does, aside from student achievement, is still very great for most of us" (p. 190). As teachers develop the insightfulness which results in personal theory building, they are artistically painting their own satisfying pictures. As Rachael re-thinks the dialogue, she re-stories the experience, recognizing the satisfaction she derives from child's play. As well, she has new insight into the meaning of the narrative text and articulates a theory about adult and children's play that may have been previously stored in her mind as tacit knowledge. In addition, Rachael reveals an insightful attitude, one in which she demonstrates commitment to a process of meaning making.

Insight implies that I can "see into" my mind and suggests particularly deep understanding. Perkins (1991) says that "when people go conspicuously beyond the information given (in reasonable ways), then we recognize that they understand" (p. 5). Thus, he believes that insight can be gained and demonstrated through understanding *performances* and states:

> [insight is] understanding that goes beyond knowing through involving readiness for a wider range of characteristic performances - not just retrieving information but explaining, exemplifying, generalizing, analogizing, and so on in the same spirit, always with an emphasis on significant novelty. (p. 5)

Perkins' view of insight can be used to further interpret the research findings. Clearly, the research participants do "go beyond the information given" in the initial Project Approach workshop. With the exception of Marie, who revealed during the first session that she could not remember some aspects of project work, the teachers are able to retrieve the information and to choose which information they will use in their classrooms and in what ways they can put it into practice. Each teacher *explains* his or her own version of project work as the study progresses and all provide *examples* of what they are doing and a rationale for their actions, albeit sometimes different from the basic intent of the Project Approach. As well, they all make *analogies* comparing project work to other pedagogical strategies and evaluate the perceived success or failure of particular methodologies. When they *generalize* the principles of project work in their own *novel* ways to form deeper personal understanding, they are building new theories that reflect their growing insight. These teachers are becoming more insightful as they develop theories about how children learn, about the world, and about themselves. As theories work, or do not work, they are appropriately confirmed or modified by individual teachers as they make these theories their own.

Perkins continues by explaining how mental models, coaching, and transfer of learning can build understanding performances or insight. First, insight can be enhanced through the disclosure of a person's existing mental models of the topic in question to give him or her something from which to build new understandings. Second, coaching starts from the premise that people learn fundamentally by doing more than receiving - by acting on their own information more than just soaking up information and refers to the kind of supportive behavior of another person to keep these understanding performances alive and thriving. Third, transfer of learning recognizes that there are connections worth making and relationships can be found between seemingly diverse notions. Therefore, in order to become more insightful, that is, to be actively involved in the process of looking and thinking deeply about ideas, I must engage in thoughtful learning. "Thoughtful learning rich with connection-making is needed for insight and for the lively and flexible use of knowledge" (Perkins, 1991. p. 6).

Using Perkins' examples, the research study provided an ideal opportunity for the research participants to develop both insights and insightfulness. The Project Approach workshop provided the teachers with a *mental model* of project work - a strong mental model because it was based on experiential learning. They definitely had a vision to guide their exploration. The inherent purpose of the study was for the teachers to learn by doing under the *coaching* and guidance of a supportive facilitator. In addition, they demonstrated *transfer* of knowledge as they made connections between new information, prior understanding, and current experience. In the final section of narrative dialogue in the preceding chapter, I present stories in which the teachers stated their personal theories in the form of interpretive themes. This thoughtful meaning making is, indeed, rich with connections that lead to deeper understandings of what it means to teach and to learn, both as children and as adults.

I believe that educational insight and personal theory building involve a return to artistic approaches of teacher research, those which Eisner (1985b) says are "less concerned with the discovery of truth than with the creation of meaning" (p. 198). He believes that truth implies singularity and monopoly, while meaning implies relativism and diversity. Eisner invites teachers to turn to the artistic, "*not* as a rejection of the scientific, but because with both we can achieve binocular vision" p. 199). He refers to these artistic approaches as "educational connoisseurship" and "educational criticism," stating that the former is the art of appreciation, while the later is the art of disclosure. In further analysis, Eisner says the "function of critical narrative, regardless of the medium used, is to help people see, understand and appraise the character and quality of educational practice and its consequences" (p. 180). Through this process of seeing, understanding, and appraising, the research participants make sense of their relative experiences. When successful, they share their artistic interpretations and disclose their resulting insight through conversation and writing, thus revealing their insightfulness through both the process and the product of their efforts.

Brad intuitively knew that he was missing something when he planned in traditional ways, and says that he "wanted to discover what it was." As he investigated alternative planning methods, he constructed theories involving experiential learning and student "ownership" over their own learning. Rachael revealed that she "bowed to the pressure because it was easier to do what it said on the timetable. Now I think I'm back on stream!" She says she came to realize that "just because it says that on the timetable, I don't have to do that subject." This insight grew out of both critical appraisal of her traditional planning practices and the resulting consequences, as well as an intuitive understanding of what she believes is effective planning and teaching. Both Brad and Rachael also demonstrated "significant novelty" and artistic connections as they disclosed insights. Brad connected his religious beliefs with what he believes about children's learning as he quoted relevant scripture. Rachael used the metaphors of the roller coaster and the merry-go-round as an analogy to describe her changing pedagogy. By creatively exploring practice and reflecting on existing beliefs, these teachers developed deeper insight to construct new personal meaning.

Brad and Rachael seemed to approach project work with insightfulness, as they transfered new learning, actively seeking connections between previous and existing practices. Brad developed insight into his teaching practice and recently said, "I have changed more this past year than I did last year." He believes that he has given students more choices and ownership, stating, "It has really happened." Similarly, Rachael feels that she gained insight into how to use the Project Approach in a way that works for her. She says she now uses Phase I with most all new topics and that her class became very good at Phase III, which she refers to as "celebration" of their learning.

In many ways during the initial stages of the study, as well as during the interpretive phase, these two teachers showed insight into components which are integral principles underlying project work. Two examples of such theories that Brad constructs are, "There is increased learning when multi-aged students work together" and "Teachers need to involve the students in the initial planning stages as well as throughout the project." In a similar way, Rachael concludes, "Teachers need to be able to validate to others why they do what they do" and "We have to see the windows of opportunity and open them." Brad sums it up well when he states, "Teachers have to realize that change often brings insecurity, but if we continue to question our thinking and actions, we will grow beyond where we are now." They each have created new teaching realities and thus, new perspectives of self in a changing world.

Sometimes the teachers do not demonstrate levels of insightfulness which lead to deeper understanding. While Marie tries to connect project work with an individualized learning model she has used in the past, she is unable to transfer Project Approach principles to make the connections that lead to new insight. However, while she does not show insight into ways to apply new learning to existing practices and beliefs, perhaps she does show self-insight as she understands that the research study and project work do not meet her needs at this time.

Ashley experiences bursts of insight that are revealed in the themes she develops in her story interpretations. For example, she says, "Children remember best what they see and do" and "Parents and teachers need to work together to decide what marks mean." She reflects on Rachael's day plans and says, "I've never thought of doing that before" and acknowledges that "Words have power." As well, after the initial data collection period, she demonstrates new insight as she states: "This type of teaching is easier than using a traditional style because it frees you to allow the children to use their own ideas and this results in more excitement and joy in learning." However, while she found this to be true in her animal project, this insight remains at a speculative level because she does not make it part of her deeper educational beliefs and values. If Ashley had effectively transfered and explored her new theories with another group of children during the next year, they may have become more firmly entrenched and her initial reflections may have connected with her current practice and thus served as constructions for a new pedagogical belief system - a new personal reality.

Insightful constructions are kaleidoscopic patterns, ever changing and evolving. The kaleidoscope of the mind, illuminated by insight, creates images from which meaning can be constructed, revisited, and revised. Thus, as the research participants develop interpersonal rapport, they are more open with each other and the exchange of ideas becomes more meaningful. Through insight, Ashley constructs a personal theory when she realizes that her misinterpretations have impeded her developing understanding of project work. Sometimes individuals rotate the kaleidoscope, as Brad does when he designs a new timetable; other times, the kaleidoscope is being manipulated for them, as happens when Ashley worries about the mandated Alberta Education achievement tests.

There can be enjoyment or disappointment in kaleidoscopic exploration, as well as in the newly-created patterns. Brad joyfully tells of his theme planning, while Rachael despairs over her unsupportive colleagues. Because one can never determine the nature of the emerging pattern, individuals may experience feelings of unease and foreboding. Conversely, unknown patterns may create a sense of awe and excitement, in anticipation of the possibilities. Ashley is somewhat uncomfortable about the prospects of teaching junior high using cooperative strategies, while Brad excitedly anticipates teaching a new double grade next year. Although certain types of patterns typically evolve, as does the issue of accountability to curricular demands, no one pattern is alike - each one is random and unpredictable. Therefore, each teacher deals with problems of curriculum coverage in his or her own unique way.

The hand stops with the creation of a pattern that is pleasing and, for the moment, both the creation and the process by which it is created is truly appreciated. Rachael expresses joy and exhilaration with her new learning about portfolio assessment. Brad feels rewarded by his students' excitement over baking cookies at his home and is impressed by their learning. However, the pattern may be equally disappointing and, in frustration, the hand turns once more, the pattern dissolves, the pieces are re-distributed, and a new pattern is created. Such is the process when the teachers struggle with new ways of structuring and planning learning experiences. Such is the process when teachers try to define ambiguous terms.

Sometimes all the pieces fall to the edges and the center is empty, waiting for a new piece to fill the void. Such is the case as the teachers strive to decenter themselves from control over the selection of topics, also questioning whether or not the center should be filled with student control. As the light of insight dims and the patterns disappear, the individual is left with a sense of chaos and disorientation. Marie experiences such disconnected feelings when the Project Approach seems unworkable. Without a pattern to guide one's vision, there can be meaninglessness. Marie cannot make sense of some aspects of the Project Approach. However, darkness often precedes sudden flashes of insight. Rachael's voice does not illuminate Ashley's vision of the project of dragons and castles, when she promotes the idea of building a castle as a means of subject integration; however, she eventually comes to understand the importance of valuing the diverse connections made by children.

I confidently believe that each little piece of colored glass inside the cylinder gives diversity to the whole, thus making the patterns richer and more unique. The unique personalities of each of these teachers, and their individual contributions to the group, made the kaleidoscopic experience meaningful and rewarding. When combined, these self-creations become patterns of something we call the culture of the school and this culture, in turn, shapes the students and teachers within. By examining each piece of the pattern, the rich intricacy of the whole is discovered.

Change involves developing deep understanding which, in turn, lead to new personal theories that value artistic insight. Insightful vision leads to changing and evolving beliefs and practices, which are integrated into the very essence of the teacher's being. If individuals need a monolithic, rigid, and ordered world in which they attempt to warp the learning process to fit preconceived dogma, then they may be unable to understand the beauty in the randomness of multiple realities in which the learning process is personally described, interpreted, and appreciated. Change is encouraged and fostered in a pluralistic world, while change is virtually impossible in a monolithic world. Deeper understanding is constructed from insight gained through experience, when the emphasis is on diversity, rather than conformity; on exploration, rather than status quo; and on growth, rather than stability; on multiplicity, rather than uniformity; and on thoughtful processes rather than quick fixes.

Summary

In this chapter I presented and analyzed four themes which emerged from the research study. Underlying these themes is the notion that enduring change, which profoundly affects one's beliefs and practices, requires the individuals who are experimenting with innovative ideas to be actively and mindfully engaged in experiential exploration. The themes center around authenticity, empowerment, ambiguity tolerance, and insightfulness. They are interactive and interrelated ideas that form the ongoing and cyclical process of educational change.

At the conclusion of the literature review in Chapter II, I outlined a framework for the research study in which I identified five components of change, suggesting possibilities for "teachers developing" when they approach professional learning based on these principles. After presenting the themes in this chapter I am able to add insight to this initial framework. The four themes in this chapter represent an analytic interpretation of my research data and are highlighted below in bold print. As well, I have written a summary statement for each theme as it relates to "developing teachers" - teachers who continually engage in meaningful ongoing professional learning experiences. In addition, each theme can be applied to the change process; thus, I have concluded each summary with an interpretive statement which also grows out of the research findings.

An appropriate umbrella phrase under which these themes can dwell is the Alberta Education theme for the upcoming Education Week celebrations in November, 1993: *"YOU ARE WHAT YOU LEARN"*.

Authentic teachers constructing enduring change

Developing teachers must firmly and authentically establish "who you are" and "what you believe in" by presenting the "real you" both to yourself and to others.

> *Change is created by authentic individuals whose actions and words reveal the essence of their being.*

Empowered teachers listening to multiple voices

Developing teachers fit the "real you" into a context where your teacher voice is integrated with multiple other voices to empower both self and children.

> *Change is created by empowered individuals who listen empathetically to the voice of the other, thus developing interdependent learning communities.*

Flexible teachers gaining tolerance for ambiguity

Developing teachers learn from living in the tension and risking the confusion caused by uncertainty among multiple, and often conflicting, realities.

> *Change is created by flexible individuals who can consider many potential possibilities before arriving at an appropriate decision.*

Thoughtful teachers developing insightfulness

Developing teachers demonstrate that "you are what you learn" through the process of insightful and artistic personal theory building based on real life experience.

Change is created by thoughtful individuals who search for deeper understandings by making personal connections to construct new meanings.

CHAPTER IX

CONSTRUCTING CHANGE IN A POSITIVIST ENVIRONMENT

> Whether my dream of communities of scholars and practitioners devoted to the study and improvement of teaching will become more than words, I cannot say. I have hope, but it is doubtful. That is why, as an optimist in my heart and a pessimist in my mind, I find the words of that Protestant reformer, Martin Luther, still satisfying: "If I knew the world were to end tomorrow, I should plant an apple tree today."
>
> Larry Cuban, 1992, p. 10

Introduction

At the outset of this dissertation I made the claim, "change is inevitable." I have recorded and analyzed the efforts of my research colleagues as they have struggled with the task of integrating new ideas and teaching strategies into their classroom practices. I have been privileged to see into their personal lives and minds as they have grappled with educational philosophies and concepts unlike those of many of their colleagues and which sometimes seem to be in contravention to the standards and norms of the official educational milieu in which they work. I have heard their voices as they have tried to deal with parental demands, collegial disapproval, curricular issues, and administrators' lack of understanding. I have interacted with developing teachers.

To this point, I have primarily dealt with change as a matter of personal initiative, focussing on individuals facing challenges in their professional learning experiences. In the previous chapter I explored four themes extrapolated from the research data and provided interpretations about the change process based on these findings. These interpretations point to possibilities for educational change and suggest ways in which individual teachers can bring about lasting personal change. However, as I have interacted with these teachers, I am also forced to realize that the elements of change are not unique or limited to the individual teacher in the classroom, but are very much related to the larger educational environment which includes the school climate, system structures, and societal values. The ability of each teacher to engage in meaningful change must be addressed from a broader perspective in relation to these external conditions.

In this chapter I describe the prevailing educational environment and, in so doing, also address the meaning of constructivist change within this positivist reality. In addition, I uncover problems and dilemmas resulting from the encouragement of change in unaccepting educational and public communities. I offer possible ways for educators to pragmatically accept inevitable change, as well as to effectively encourage and actively promote necessary change. In so doing, I recognize the wisdom in Cuban's words as he addresses the tension between hope and doubt, between optimism and pessimism. Like Cuban, I also choose to conclude with a positive message. My faith lies in constructivist teachers who can actualize the motto of Brad's school system: "Educating today's child for tomorrow's world."

The Positivist Educational Environment

Social institutions, by their very nature are self-protective and self-perpetuating. The political, economic, and religious forces of society conspire against change to preserve the status quo. The status quo, in this context, is the positivist educational milieu. As teachers, most of us have grown up within this monolithic environment. The positivist paradigm is firmly entrenched in the institutions of the family, the church, and the school - the primary socializing agencies of our children. In this section, I endeavor to look at the issues surrounding professional learning from an institutional perspective, recognizing in the words of Eisner (1985b), that: "Because the press of the institution is so significant, the problem of bringing about change within classrooms cannot be isolated from the school's constraints on and incentives for change" (p. 374).

In Chapter VII, Rachael authors a story titled, Impossible Frustrations, identifying a litany of personal constraints preventing her from using project work in her classroom. While Rachael is intrinsically motivated to overcome these problems and to effectively deal with the issues, there are many teachers who lack the confidence, creativity, and expertise to challenge the status quo. In addition, there are many more educators who accept "the way things are" and do not attempt to change traditional curriculum development and implementation or existing leadership roles. In fact, such individuals may well believe that to challenge the system is unnecessary and perhaps even a dangerous threat to firmly held beliefs and values. However, the ability or inability of any one teacher to change or not to change is more than a personal and motivational issue. There are social conditions that make change difficult and, in many cases, impossible. Listening to the voices of the research participants, I identify three powerful obstacles which make it difficult to engage in new ways of thinking about and participating in educational experiences with children. These are: 1) administrative mandates of Alberta Education, as well as curriculum prescriptions imposed and maintained at the school and community level; 2) the leadership provided by school administrators; and 3) personal and professional entrenchment of beliefs, values, and practices.

A Curriculum with Positivist Values

Eisner (1985b) identifies the prevailing curriculum as based upon "scientific assumptions," "systematic procedures," and a "means-end" planning orientation. While the teachers in this research study explore a more constructivist and inclusive approach to curriculum, they clearly demonstrate a preoccupation with the positivist scientific model as they concomitantly struggle with behavioral objectives, standardized outcomes, student worksheets, required textbooks and teacher guidebooks. When Marie compares project work planning with traditional unit planning, she states: "In units you have objectives, tasks, and outcomes and you know where you're going," thus demonstrating her ambiguity with an emergent and negotiated planning method. As Eisner says, this positivist tradition has all but excluded any other point of view toward curriculum development. As the research participants explore new horizons, they express their frustration with traditional curriculum expectations, but still feel accountable to them and conscientiously strive to *implement* the curricular objectives, *cover* the content and *teach* the skills in the Alberta Education Program of Studies.

Eisner (1985b) identifies two predominant curriculum forces and labels them the "intended curriculum" and the "operational curriculum." In like manner, Aoki (1993) acknowledges a difference between the "planned curriculum" and the "lived curriculum." The research participants, and many of their colleagues, typically focus their major efforts on the intended or the planned curriculum. This is what I would expect, as does Brad when he reflects on teachers' obsession to pre-plan everything and rhetorically states: "It's our training, isn't it?"

The stories in Chapter VII under the heading, **Planning Learning Experiences,** demonstrate these teachers' concerns with subject coverage, lesson planning and curricular content, as they strive to develop personal strategies to deal with the issues. Brad makes a chart to see if he's covered all the skills, and Rachael puts yellow sticky notes in her plan book each time she covers a required objective. Ashley states, "Until you know all the concepts in each subject, it's easier not to integrate." Their desire to integrate subjects, because this is the focus of the "soon to be implemented" Program Continuity Policy, is juxtaposed against their need to be accountable for each objective in each particular subject. There is an underlying general understanding and common sense acceptance that teachers should "do communities" in grade two and that achievement tests are necessary in grade three. There is also a common sense understanding that grade one work must be adequately covered before a child moves on to grade two, in spite of the fact that, as Rachael points out, the newly adopted language learning curriculum is organized in continuous levels of skill development without reference to specific grades.

Curriculum comes from the Latin word, *currere*, and means "the course to be run." From a positivist perspective, the subjects or courses must be run in a linear and sequential manner and, often without realizing the underlying meaning of our actions, we give some subjects preferential positions in the race. Rachael's administrator requires each teacher to designate so many minutes for each subject and, traditionally, more minutes are required for some subjects than for others. Teachers also typically support the importance of some subjects over others. Ashley places much more importance on reading and writing tasks than she does on art experiences. She also worries that the principal may feel like she "blew the whole afternoon" if she does only project work and cannot present lesson plans for specific subject content. Again, it is just common sense that one should spend more time on the "academic subjects" than on art or music or physical education, and that these important subjects should be scheduled for mornings when the children are more alert. All the teachers initially planned to experiment with project work in the afternoons, after the objectives from language arts and math are covered in the morning. In fact, when Rachael worries that she will be unable to program for children with special needs as they are integrated with her regular students, she finds solace in the fact that they do not come in for academic subjects. (It is interesting that she has changed her attitude this past year and is looking into reading programs for children with special needs who are now regularly integrated in her classroom for some academic subjects.)

With the emphasis on a metaphor in which curriculum is seen as a course or race to be run, competitiveness is a natural and obvious outcome. Ashley perpetuates this attitude when she moves her desks from groups into rows for "government testing." Ironically, she is frustrated when the children pile books around themselves to hide their papers during a spelling test, revealing that they, too, support this competitive value. Rachael reports that she is required to give standardized tests to determine which children are eligible for learning assistance. Other tests must be given to make decisions about whether or not students should be passed to the next grade. Similarly, competition is a premise driving Ashley's principal's belief in "some kind of mark or letter on the report card" and also one that leads to her students' comments about the percentage grades they receive for their project work. Rachael is concerned that she not "get behind" her grade two teaching partner, and Brad says he doesn't like feeling like he is competing with Peggy during the time when they both do a school project. This competitive aspect of curriculum is so firmly ingrained, both in our belief system and in our practices, that it is seldom questioned. It takes "a light going on" before Ashley recognizes that all the children don't have to deal with the same aspects of a project topic. Children also acknowledge this difficult "obstacle course," as they enthusiastically state that non-traditional projects are not "real work" and that the time goes by quickly when they are doing centers. However, the "work ethic" is another common sense value that supports curriculum implementation.

The stories, What is teaching? and What is learning? both demonstrate the teachers' anxieties over compromising the intended or planned curriculum as they recognize the operational or lived curriculum. In a positivist tradition, alleviating this tension is commonly seen as an "either-or" choice. In contrast, Aoki (1993) promotes a curriculum supporting constructivist principles. He advocates a curriculum of multiplicity which he refers to as the "C & C Landscape," one that reduces the primacy of the planned curriculum or the "Curriculum and Instruction (C & I) Landscape" changing it to a "Curricular Landscape of Multiplicity." This perspective, which embodies both the curriculum-as-plan and the curricula-as-lived, is not a tenet of the positivist curriculum tradition in which the research participants are immersed. However, while the teachers in this study do not reject traditional curriculum expectations, they search for creative means to incorporate prevailing practices. As they explore alternate methods of curriculum development which may better fit the multiple and diverse needs, abilities and interests of individual children and teachers, I believe they are working towards a personal understanding of Aoki's conception of the "C & C Curriculum."

Educational Leadership

Contemporary literature supports the view that leadership is the key to the restructuring of schools through the development of individual teachers within a community of learners (Barth, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1992; Patterson, 1993). Such perspectives are based on the need to change traditional styles of leadership that are not as conducive to the professional development of teachers or to optimum learning of students in today's society. Barth (1990, p. 45) says traditional leaders typically focus on monitoring adult behavior, controlling students, assuring student achievement, and measuring the observable attainment of prescribed skills and goals for both students and teachers. The negative affects of positivist administrators who exercise authoritarian hierarchical kinds of leadership are expressed by the teachers in this research study.

Rachael identifies a managerial style of leadership in her school in which the principal exercises power over his staff and all aspects of the school operation. She says her school is "very structured" and provides examples of the administrator's dominance in his organization of timetable regulations, staff responsibilities, math materials, library rules, and even staff meetings. He keeps firm control of both the school budget and of the ways monies are allocated within the school, as illustrated by his refusal to give her permission to go on a bus field trip or to return unwanted textbooks to the publisher. While Brad typically feels supported by his administrators, he also reveals his internalized fear of authoritarian leadership as he anxiously anticipates what may happen if the superintendent or principal came into his classroom during project work time and asked him for specific plans and objectives which he may not have readily available. Ashley expresses similar trepidation of the principal's opinion as she speculates about a potentially negative evaluation of her teaching if she questions his authority; however, she also expresses her appreciation of his support of her work with the Project Approach. As well, Rachael reports that her principal liked her ideas about Program Continuity and that his approval lifted her spirits.

These examples demonstrate consequences of the power, both positive and negative, that school administrators have over teachers when the system is steeped in a positivist tradition. Sergiovanni (1992, p. 69) refers to this type of leadership as a blending of bureaucratic and psychological styles in which the principal uses the" authority of hierarchy, rules, regulations, job specifications, and assignments," as well as the "authority of rewards that comes from practicing human relations leadership and fulfilling human needs." While he states that there is a place for both styles in school leadership, he believes the problems in exclusively using these methods tend to place teachers in a subordinate position within the school structure.

Sergiovanni (1992) also states that traditional views of leadership are male-oriented and that "males tend to emphasize individual relationships, individual achievement, power as a source for controlling events and people, independence, authority, and set procedures" (p. 136). Thus, they behave in patriarchal ways which also tends to make teachers even more dependent on their approval. This may be especially true for female teachers and Marie would certainly agree with Sergiovanni's view of male leadership. She pragmatically sums up a common attitude of many teachers as she comments: "I hate to tell the principal that I feel like he's holding me back, because I would be nagging. It seems like male administrators have this power thing. They don't like to be the underdog and if you know more than they do, then they get upset."

Personal and Professional Entrenchment

Many teachers, administrators and parents are entrenched in a status quo system - a system which reinforces yesterday's values in today's society. Patterson (1993, pp. 38-39) expands upon this idea as he contrasts today's values with those of tomorrow, stating that schools need to be "pulled by the future" instead of being "pushed by the past." Such contemporary values are entrenched within the school system and the social culture, as well as within the hearts and minds of both individual teachers and students, as they also contribute to the preservation of traditional educational practices and a positivist educational environment. Rachael insightfully recognizes the dilemma as she discloses: "I have never found it easy to make changes. I like the security that is provided by that which is familiar."

Obedience to authority is a strong cultural value. Teachers generally believe that they must listen to their leaders and do what they are told to do by these individuals. While attitudes may be slowly changing, children are also generally socialized in a like manner in homes, schools, and communities. This hierarchically power structure is the status quo in most of our schools. As was pointed out in the previous section, it is "top-down control" that is most evident in the schools in which Marie, Ashley, and Rachael work. The typical role of principals in these schools is primarily to demand, supervise, evaluate, and approve or reject. Teachers often view their superintendents in a similar way. Ashley reports that her superintendent mandated that each student in his system must have a portfolio. Peggy admits, "I've had some superintendents who were nightmares and I'm still a bit paranoid." A similar reticent attitude is evident in the students, as both Rachael and Ashley express their frustration with children who depend upon the teacher to tell them exactly what they should do. However, just as teachers and students seldom influence those above them on the administrative ladder, principals and superintendents are also at the mercy of government edicts and changing political parties and education ministers. While Alberta Education can regulate practice with the Program Continuity Policy, a different political leadership can change this tenuous direction and maintain the status quo within the system. This inconsistency and incoherence makes teachers frightened of potential mandates and cynical toward imposed change. Obedience to the status quo at least offers some security.

Another commonly held value lies in "falling in line" with the overall direction set by those in power. Rachael says, "I have to fit with the reality of what my school expects me to do." The emphasis is on standardization and conformity, stressing that each teacher and each student should meet uniform goals imposed by the power brokers. Different control groups and community opinion leaders wield this control over teachers and students at different times. Power can be enforced by the government, the administrators, the parents, and even one's colleagues. It is a risk for Brad to expose his feelings about the "school unit" to Peggy, just as it takes courage for him to ignore collegial criticism when initially experimenting with project work. Marie worries about parents who may not approve of project work or of field trips and is concerned about their comparison of her pedagogical methods with those of her teaching partner. Ashley also reports that parents want traditional reporting systems in which they receive "class averages" to "see if their child is doing better or worse than others." Brad says that he wanted to visit another school because, "I'm not sure what I'm doing according to the norm" and this "helps me to set my benchmarks." Ashley expresses relief in knowing the rationale behind project work so that "I can defend myself, if necessary." There is reason for her to be concerned as teachers often find it necessary to counteract negative media reports, as happens when conservative journalists speak out against progressive approaches to education. And perhaps most difficult of all is a teacher's personal dilemma as he or she internally debates conformity to traditional perspectives. Brad points out: "I was fighting the status quo within myself." Most of us grew up in traditional schools and, as Ashley says, "When in doubt, teachers teach the way they were taught because they know that works." Brad recognizes the same dilemma when he states: "I'm tempted to teach the way that I was taught, but I know better and often catch myself." Brad also says, "It is hard to break away" and he is right!

In addition, there are psychological forces which serve to further entrench existing values. The prevailing value supports group harmony, cohesiveness, and contentment. While it is impossible to deny the long term importance of these attributes, the single-minded pursuit of such values does not necessarily provide a climate that supports change. When schools are built on the foundations of congeniality, instead of professionalism and collegiality, there may be little conflict, but there may also be no challenging problem solving and learning taking place (Barth, 1990, p. 30 ; Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 4, 91). In my interpretation of Ashley's project work story, I question her need to be comfortable, while also acknowledging that this is a commonly entrenched priority for most of us. Ashley finds it frustrating to promote new ideas amongst unenlightened colleagues, or to risk rejection by her principal, as these behaviors may threaten harmonious staff relationships. A congenial and comfortable atmosphere may also be what has led Rachael to shut her door, realizing that the collegial support that she desires is not available among her staff members. Thus, she chooses to search outside her school for professional challenge.

In the technical rational mode of operation, there is a climate of decisiveness in which firm decisions are valued. There is little looking back to reconsider what may have been, or looking forward to consider possible options. Such is the case in issues of student retention. Teachers tend to believe that it is important to make firm decisions and to live with them, just as teachers in this paradigm encourage children to make firm decisions about what they choose to do and to take responsibility for these choices. This is a common sense value which is firmly entrenched in today's school practices. Such status quo values are addressed in Chapter VII under the heading, **Ethical and Moral Issues**. In the story, What is educational equality?, the teachers are questioning the "rules" and in What is teaching?, Brad is struggling with the technical rational realities of teaching.

Similarly, from a technical rationalist point of view, efficiency is valued, as is the one correct answer. Marie tells us very directly that she values "time on task" and "efficiency," and that she is unwilling to engage in prolonged experimentation with alternate teaching methods if she discovers that they challenge these values. Making mistakes is not beneficial when operating from an efficiency model. Children support this value as Rachael explains that her students "are used to having it spelled correctly and if the letter isn't perfect they're frustrated." Rachael's colleague, Karen, feels like her bulletin board has to be perfect; thus, she does it herself to ensure the neatness and order that may be absent if children were to design displays. This type of perfectionism may explain why Ashley "shut up" and didn't challenge the system as a first year teacher. It is difficult to question the common sense values that support firm rules to ensure children sit quietly in desks which all face the chalkboard, line up quickly and in an orderly manner when they come in from recess, and behave properly in groups. Few question these practices because they are firmly entrenched in the effective management of an efficient school.

The following anecdote illustrates, from a larger social context, both the power of tradition in maintaining the status quo and of the paradox involved in promoting change with teachers who have had long and effective teaching careers. A friend poignantly relates his thoughts during a recent school Remembrance Day Service.

> A few white-haired men and women stand proudly at attention on November 10 in front of a school gymnasium full of elementary school students while the Last Post sounds in memory of their fallen comrades in the Great Wars of the century. While the children are largely unaware of the meaning of their sacrifices, even they can see that it takes a supreme effort to unfold the naturally stooped bodies one more time into the proud, erect attention befitting the faithful soldiers they once were. Time and the trials of life have taken a toll on these veterans. Above their heads is displayed a flag they did not defend, and there are fewer and fewer people who join them each year in these services. None of the children, and few of the teachers, remember the circumstances and

> events being commemorated at that moment. In their minds, beneath the present sense of emotion, memory, and patriotic feelings, are only the images of today's television newscasts. Images of neo-nazi demonstrations in Germany, and the fighting in Bosnia which is so closely associated with the issues of World War I. As these veterans leave the gymnasium, would they be justified in questioning the meaning of their lives, the contribution of their effort, or the current state of society? They certainly must question the meaning of the sacrifice of life by their fellow soldiers who lost their lives in battle, or the many veterans whose lives were cut short by the abuse of their bodies in war. They feel some pain in their own bodies as they march away, and ask the question, "What is the meaning of life and service to one's country"? The answer to their question may be found in the words of the hymn they will hear in tomorrow's church parade:
>
> *Change and decay in all around I see,*
> *O Thou who changest not, abide with me.*
>
> Veteran teachers do not have a Remembrance Day to commemorate their sacrifices for the education of children, yet daily, they are reminded that the flag under which they have served for years is changing. The social order that they have defended for years is becoming hard to recognize, and they question the meaning of their lives of educational service.

Change is indeed inevitable! This story suggests what it may be like for teachers who support a world view in which change is symbolically seen as "decay." They often feel that their years of service and dedication to children are depreciated by advocates of educational change. However, the fact that the political system has put into law the maintenance of an official school ceremony powerfully demonstrates the feeling of parents, and the community at large, to preserve the positivist values upon which the current system is founded. Such is the ambiguity of cultural change. While change does appear to depreciate the valued service of educators of the past, the message which needs to be heard is one which values previous practices as "right" in their time, but allows new practices to emerge which support changing students in changing times. Those who won't change must not stand in the way of those who choose to change, and those involved in change must also empathize with other points of view. I hurt when I hear Marie internalize the problems of imposed change with the comment, "You feel like you've never done anything right before."

Possibilities for Constructing Change

It was not my intention to present the previous section as a cynical criticism of an entrenched positivist environment, but rather to provide readers with a personal interpretation of what I see as educational reality in today's society, based on the reflections of the research participants. As people engage in professional learning, it is important for them to be keenly aware of implicit meanings within existing practices and prevailing values. When approached from this position, suggestions for effective ways to construct meaningful change are both possible and powerful. In an interdependent community, we are well advised to follow the advise of Covey (1989) as he suggests that we "seek first to understand and then to be understood." Thus, I first try to construct meaning of constructivist change in a positivist environment by exploring the writings of contemporary educators.

A Caring Community of Learners

Noddings (1984) applies an "ethic of caring" to the principle of moral education. She believes the primary responsibility of educators is to preserve and enhance caring in themselves and in those with whom they come in contact. Moral principles guide the thinking of caring educators, resulting in genuine encounters of caring and being cared for. Noddings suggests that the establishment of ethical relationships can be developed through the reorganization of school structures based on the idea of circles and chains, instead of the usual emphasis on hierarchical order. She recognizes that women are unlikely to seek domination in education; therefore, their circles will be circles of support and not of power. In a basic overview of her perspective, she says:

> Circles would define sets of actual relation, and chains would describe formal relation - those places to be filled eventually by persons for whom we are prepared to care, as we do now those within our circles. We might also employ the notion of cycles: Career teachers might teach for three years and then spend a year in administrative work or study. (p. 199)

Noddings cautions readers that her views are illustrative, rather than prescriptive, and says they are simply an invitation for men and women to join in a dialectic conversation. I find it interesting, and hopeful, that eminent male critics of education reveal a similar perspective in current literature. Barth (1990), Sergiovanni (1992) and Patterson (1993) all believe one of the answers to a new and more effective type of school structure is one in which teachers, students, parents, and administrators work interdependently as a "community of learners" and a "community of leaders." In such an environment the school principal is primarily seen as the "head learner" within a caring environment. In such a milieu, the administrative role as "instructional leader" is only one responsibility among many others.

In presenting his personal values, Barth (1990) says, "I would like to go each day to a school to be with other adults who genuinely wanted to be there, who really chose to be there because of the importance of their work to others and to themselves" (p. 9). He continues by expressing his profound respect for diversity and his commitment to the celebration of important differences between children. He feels the premise that "every teacher can lead" is a powerful one, but clearly states that this does not mean that every teacher wants to lead, should lead, or should be expected or required to lead. Barth's personal vision of an ideal school is one in which everyone is teaching and learning as they clarify and become more confident about their goals, ideas, and practices so they can act thoughtfully within a "community of learners." He stresses collegiality in which "teachers and principals talk with one another about practice, observe one another engaged in their work, share their craft knowledge with each other, and actively help each other become better" (p. 163). He promotes risk taking, advocates ongoing recommitment to the teaching profession, and promotes humor as the glue that binds an assorted group of individuals into a community. Clearly, Barth emphasizes the primacy of learning, but he also says the basis of effective learning is "low anxiety and high standards." His vision revolves around a caring ethic.

Sergiovanni also believes the basis of learning communities is a commitment to the caring ethic which means "doing everything possible to serve the learning, development, and social needs of students as persons" (p. 53). He stresses leadership as stewardship within a community and, like Barth, believes that each person has the potential to be a leader in some way. While continuing to value the managerial and human relations responsibilities of a school leader, he recognizes the integration of the heart, the head, and the hand in leadership, defining the heart as "what I value and believe;" the head as "my mindscape of how the world works;" and the hand as "my decisions, actions and behaviors" (pp. 6-9). A primary premise supporting Sergiovanni's beliefs is the "empowerment rule," which frees individuals to do whatever makes sense, as long as decisions embody shared values and an understanding of power as liberating both the administrators and the teachers. He further recognizes, as does Noddings, that women in leadership "tend to emphasize successful relationships, affiliation, power as the means to achieve shared goals, connectedness, authenticity, and personal creativity" (p. 136).

Often the flexibility of caring education is viewed as laissez-faire and even subversive; however, Segiovanni supports fundamental moral principles which serve as the underpinnings of virtuous schools, demonstrating strong caring values in education. He stresses collegial or professional "followship" of these important moral principles. A basic principle states that virtuous schools support the creation of self-learners and self-managers. Another tenet is based upon provision for the whole child, addressing all aspects of physical, social-emotional, and intellectual development in each individual person. Virtuous schools also believe that each child can learn and provide diverse opportunities for everyone to do so. As well, they honor mutual respect among unique individuals. Finally, virtuous schools support equal partnerships among schools, parents, teachers and community members. When these moral values are widely supported, an environment is created in which the resulting pedagogical practices free the participants to learn most effectively in ways that best meet their unique needs, interests, and abilities.

In a similar vein, Patterson (1993, pp. 5-13) advocates the values of tomorrow which he says include openness to active participation, diverse perspectives, healthy conflict resolution, personal reflection, and making and learning from mistakes. He suggests that in tomorrow's schools, leadership will mean assuming responsibility for influencing others, rather than emphasis on controlling others. Patterson states: "[Leadership] will be more fluid and sometimes more transitory. And it clearly will be shared by many through the course of events. Tomorrow, one person sitting at the top of the chart or at the head of the table won't carry the weight of leading alone" (p. 86). These forward thinking individuals all support a constructivist perspective, valuing personal meaning making through active experience within a collective and supportive environment of unique individuals.

I would be remiss to exclude post secondary institutions from the list of partnerships among learning communities. It is important to develop dialectic relationships between schools and universities, between school teachers and university professors. A basic dilemma identified by the research participants was the effect of their own positivist learning experiences on their current beliefs and practices. Joan Irvine and Wayne Serebrin, professors in the Early Years Teacher Education program at the University of Manitoba, are addressing this concern in the development and team teaching delivery of two fourth year education methods courses. They presented findings from their action research project at the Canadian Association for Young Children Annual Conference in April, 1993 in a seminar session titled: Finding our Voices in a Community of Learners.

At the beginning of their courses, they elicited the students' views about education, leading them to an understanding of the positivist paradigm in which they had all been educated and toward a mutual exploration of ways in which they could break out of this old paradigm. They actively experimented with these ideas, jointly engaging in constructivist teaching and learning experiences. Irvine and Serebrin modeled excitement for their own learning and investigated their own questions, thus building trust through personal risk taking. They reported that the biggest challenges lay in overcoming entrenched beliefs and practices about assignments and grading, as well as in meeting the evaluation demands of the institution. During the first term the students showed little understanding of these educational possibilities; however, many students began to develop new insight into alternative ways of teaching and learning during the second semester. While these professors celebrated the transformational changes in many individuals, they also cautioned that institutional contraints made their project very difficult and that it was extremely time and energy intensive. However, when constructivist ways of teaching are modeled in teacher training programs, prospective teachers have a much greater likelihood of emerging from university with beliefs and methods different from those in their educational pasts.

Developing Responsibility for Professional Learning

I have come full circle and now return to the pragmatic realities of the individual teacher. Lowe (1991) quotes a teacher who states: "It's not so much that we're afraid of change, or so in love with the old ways, but it's that place in between we fear. It's like being between trapezes. It's Linus when his blanket is in the dryer. There's nothing to hold on to" (p. 13). However, in the final analysis the ability to deal with this fear and to create the power to change ultimately resides within the individual person, regardless of a supportive or nonsupportive educational milieu. The teachers in this research study took personal responsibility for their attitude toward change by engaging in a meaning making exploration of project work. They participated in a professional learning experience in which they engaged in collegial conversations, dialogue journalling, and their own personal classroom research. They demonstrated that teacher research can result in personal theory building which can be a powerful change agent in the development of new skills, knowledge, and attitudes.

Barth (1990, pp. 86-102) challenges teachers to advance these personal theories, as he promotes the value of teachers' writing and publishing their own intimate experiences of life in the classroom. Putting "practice into prose" is a professional development activity with a potential for promoting reflection, clarification, and articulation of beliefs, as well as a means to effectively influence the field of education. While Barth outlines the obstacles towards such endeavors (lack of time, complexities of the system, fear of failure, interpersonal, political, and legal problems), he also recommends professional writing as a source of personal recognition and tangible rewards, as well as a way to leave one's mark in the field of education. Teachers commonly keep diaries and journals of classroom anecdotes which can serve as rich material to illustrate generalizations, as well as to provide new visions for future practice.

There are many other opportunities for personal exploration and the research participants demonstrated this throughout the study. Visitations to other schools, participation in workshops, seminars, and conferences, as well as professional reading and enrollment in university courses are all relevant possibilities. There are teacher networks established in central Alberta by teachers who wish to meet regularly to engage in dialogue about project work. Universities, in collaboration with teachers, have designed research projects with mutual benefits. In addition, Teacher Centers have been established to invite dialogue among interested professionals. Barth (1990) has been instrumental in establishing Principal's Centers in partnership with Harvard

University. These collaborative centers hold promise for developing meaningful collegial support among school administrators.

Perhaps an even more basic place to begin the change process is through personal exploration of ideas. In my case, and in that of the research participants, we are striving to better understand constructivist teaching. In order to apply constructivist principles to our teaching, we must explore pedagogy and subject matter, as well as our fundamental belief systems. In discussing this dilemma, Prawat (1992) says that constructivism is a relatively new term on the educational scene and many of its educational implications are unclear and open to many interpretations. At this point, constructivist views of teaching are considerably less developed than are constructivist views of learning. This becomes problematic when applied to instruction. Prawat believes that a teacher who wishes to adopt a constructivist perspective must be willing to rethink not only what it means to know subject matter, but also what it takes to foster this kind of understanding in students. He states: "This is a tall order. Such change is unlikely to occur without a good deal of discussion and reflection on the part of teachers. Identifying what is problematic about existing beliefs, however, is an important first step in the change process". (p. 361).

A logical second step toward change is the active promotion of one's own value system within the status quo. If teachers are truly committed to constructivist principles and genuinely believe that children will learn most effectively within a community of learners and leaders, then perhaps they need to champion their beliefs in the face of positivist results-based rhetoric. If teachers are committed to principles supporting individual meaning making through unique, diverse, and personal active learning experiences, then they can be confident that children will ultimately learn more effectively, thereby successfully achieving the objectives mandated in the Program of Studies. If basic moral principles are at the core of one's educational values, then pedagogical methods can also be diverse and each teacher can personally choose the most appropriate means of educating children. Therefore, constructivist teaching methods are not a denial of rational learning goals, but an acceptance of multiple ways of developing knowledge and skills which are important in a changing world.

The research participants demonstrate creative and practical ways in which they can work within the system to achieve personal goals. When most effective, teachers do not employ subversive tactics, but rather proactive assertion and active promotion of successful ways of creating personally satisfying teaching experiences, while still meeting the stated goals of the curriculum-as-plan. This is not blindly following mandates, but the thoughtful pursuit of articulated educational values. Brad takes advantage of an opportunity to create a multi-age learning experience when there is no substitute teacher available. Rachael plans her time table with back to back periods of social studies and language arts to give her larger blocks of time to do project work. Rachael and Ashley recognize that more adult participation is beneficial during field trips and solicit increased parent involvement. In addition, all the teachers understand that appropriate evaluation data is needed to support results-based education and are actively exploring performance and portfolio assessment. They take responsibility for achieving mandated outcomes in constructivist ways.

The contemporary educators mentioned in this section do not focus on a particular age group as they promote educational change. Their views are inclusive and can be applied to all levels of education; thus, their ideas are certainly relevant in educating three to eight year old children in kindergarten, primary, or elementary school programs. However, as an early childhood educator, I often feel the tension between my feelings of superiority toward our constructivist tradition and my disappointment in the reluctance of educators within the larger educational community to explore alternative approaches. While early childhood educators must be careful not to express their views in self-righteous or patronizing ways, we can effectively influence the system. However, I often feel that our voices are ignored, that we lack an attentive audience, and that our work is not valued both within the educational system and in the general community. Whether or not this is, in fact, a reality is inconsequential, as these feelings are powerful deterrents of advocacy and change. I believe that early childhood educators have the opportunity to be leaders in the schools of tomorrow, if we adhere to our fundamental principles and do not surrender to the prevailing positivist perspective. Traditionally, educators of young children develop intimate relationships with their students as they actively engage with them in developmentally appropriate experiential learning projects. We need to trust in the power of our intuitive knowledge and in the strength of our pedagogical skills as we support one another in promoting caring educational communities. Early childhood educators do need to find their voices.

When traditional values are in jeopardy, people respond in different ways. Some are *rule breakers* who aggressively attack the status quo with loud voices demanding a forum for their views and independently flying in the face of tradition. Others are *rule followers* who are so entrenched in the "way things are supposed to be" that their voices are mute and their minds closed to alternative possibilities. Some people believe that the hope for change lies in making new rules; however, perhaps *rule makers* may simply be creating another positivist system of regulations as they develop new absolutes. I believe the most effective perspective toward influencing change involves meaning making. *Meaning makers* are those who predict their future by creating it. Teachers who interdependently work to construct new meanings to accommodate and plan for tomorrow can be powerful change agents.

While the teachers in this study are entrapped by the rules of the positivist perspective permeating the school system, they did strive to become constructivist meaning makers through their professional learning experiences. As I reflect on their development during this research study, I interpret their actions and discourse in diverse ways. Marie says she is in a constant state of renewal as she continually searches out new programs and classroom methods. She is somewhat skeptical as she pragmatically seeks new ideas that can be integrated into her existing positivist pedagogy. Although Marie is aware that the rules are changing, she is basically a rule follower and a lack of clear educational goals is frustrating. Ashley is a survivor of her first years of classroom teaching, and is now in the process of constructing an individualized pedagogy. Paradoxically, she periodically steps out of her comfortable paradigm to make new rules of her own, while concomitantly requiring the security that comes with following the rules and guidelines of the positivist system in which she was educated and trained. Neither Brad nor Rachael behave consistently as rule breakers, rule followers, or rule makers; however, they are most aware of these rules, sensitive to them, and will manipulate them to meet personal goals. Brad is a mature individual, young in his career but carrying with him a strong set of moral principles and increasing amounts of self-efficacy. As well, he has the administrative support that is lacking in the career of Rachael. She is a mature and seasoned teacher with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to insightfully differentiate among pedagogical practices. Rachael has strong convictions and is willing to do what is necessary to follow the principles of moral education. Both Brad and Rachael are effectively constructing new meanings in their quest to coherently bring together their educational practices and their personal values.

Summary

In this chapter I have addressed the problems and dilemmas of constructivist change within the prevailing positivist educational milieu. In the positivist environment, the curriculum is imposed and maintained at the school level and supported by the community. Educational administration is typically based on authoritarian and psychological leadership models, focusing on instructional school leadership to the exclusion of other perspectives. Personal and professional beliefs, values and practices are firmly entrenched to promote the status quo. Pedagogical practices support obedience to authority, conformity, group harmony, decisiveness, and efficiency which are all fundamental values of positivist education. Single-minded adherence to such beliefs may be harmful to the change process.

Contemporary educational critics are providing new directions and challenges to meet the changing needs of today and to prepare for the possibilities of the future. I have drawn on the work of Noddings, Barth, Sergiovanni and Patterson to describe the caring communities of learners and leaders these writers feel are important in the effective restructuring of schools. Such learning and leading communities must be based on moral principles within virtuous schools. There is also a need for multiple and equal partnerships among public schools, post-secondary institutions, parents, teachers, and community members.

Individual teachers can take personal responsibility for their personal and professional development. It is possible for authentic teachers to effectively influence the educational system; however, enduring change requires both internal conviction and social action. Powerful teachers engage in a change process which allows them to feel differently, and to perceive and act upon the world differently. Effective ways of encouraging and supporting individual change include personal introspection, collegial collaboration, classroom teacher research, writing professional publications, professional development activities, teacher and principal centers, achieving mandated objectives using performance assessment strategies, and proactive action to meet personal and collective principles of moral education. Early childhood educators can also play an important role in promoting caring educational communities. Interdependent teachers, working within collegial schools, construct new meanings to more effectively serve the children of both the present and the future.

CHAPTER X

NARRATIVE EPILOGUE

> Pristine objectivity is an epistemological impossibility. The empty mind sees nothing.
>
> Elliot Eisner, 1985 b, p. 185

Introduction

The value of narrative is in its ability to lay bare the feelings, perceptions, and knowledge of individual teachers, thus revealing self in the process. Research, like life, is not politically or socially neutral. The biases of the participants contribute to the richness of the understanding and to the authenticity of personal meaning making. None of us in this research study claims to be absolutely right, only to be seeking expansion of our educational horizons and those of our students and our colleagues. An ethic of care guides our practices and we strive to develop coherent knowledge, skills, and values through meaningful professional learning. We recognize that we are involved in an ongoing journey of developmental change, all at our own places along the path. We find this journey both challenging and rewarding.

Voicing the Visions

In the epilogue to this research study, I wish to present the voices of the research participants as they unfold their educational visions. These visions are day dreams, a looking ahead to what might be, what can be, and what we want to be. They can also represent the difference between what is and what ought to be. As such, reflective visions are "dreams with wings." Vision making is another avenue for constructing meaning, decentering the primacy of behavioral objectives in a celebration of another type of knowing. Barth (1990) believes that the importance of creating visions goes well beyond the value of personal meaning making. He says: "Honoring the visions of others, maintaining fidelity to one's own vision, and at the same time working toward a collective vision and coherent institutional purpose constitute an extraordinary definition of school leadership and represent one of the most important undertakings facing those who would improve schools from within" (p. 156).

Visions are not static. They are constantly changing as we grow and change. As such, they are intimate creations and thus subject to the inconsistencies of human nature. Our visions are open to continual scrutiny as we search and research, consider and reconsider, vision and revision. Constructing these educational visions is like writing a novel. Ashton-Warner says, "You can't be sure of your beginning until you have checked it out with your ending" (cited in Berthoff, 1987, p. 29). In the articulation and sharing of our visions-in-progress they become clearer, while also vulnerable to our changing interpretations. These visions are never complete and each interpretation only represents our position at that present moment in time. It is my wish that the teachers in this research study will become visionary leaders involved in a never-ending process of vision making which can provide them with a sense of direction and a destination, however temporary, as they journey forward with a community of learners and leaders toward moral education in virtuous schools of tomorrow.

I expected that the visions of Ashley, Brad and Rachael might be dream-like stories of educational fantasies, probably because this is the type of educational vision I would enjoy creating. I was mistaken; instead, they are practical narratives representing the realities of real life experiences in which they reveal their authentic selves. Their visions suggest the paths they have chosen and point to the directions in which they are headed, but they do not suggest revolt against the educational system in which they are involved. In fact, perhaps their visions suggest that we cope with the ambiguities of educational change by constructing personal visions within the realm of the possible in the schools of today. Brad says, "Everything comes one stage at a time and we need to be patient." In the end, perhaps teachers approach educational change primarily from a pragmatic perspective, taking appropriate and realistic risks based on their personal beliefs and values.

I invited each teacher to construct a personal vision of an ideal teaching and learning experience. I also asked them to identify a person with whom they would like to share this experience, and finally to describe the vision to me. Let us listen to the voices of the teachers as they share their educational visions.

Ashley's Vision

Energizing Through Choices

> I'd share my ideal teaching experience with my good friend, Tammy, because I think she's a great teacher and I'd also like to impress her with the incredible things that I'm doing. I would be teaching a grade nine class during a language arts period. The room would be really bright and colorful (It would be more like an elementary classroom, than the ordinary junior high classroom!) and there would be lots of colorful student and teacher displays around the room. There would be several pillows in one corner of

the room and several computers in another corner. Students would sit at tables in groups of three or four and my desk would be at the back of the room. It's during the presentation of their final projects at the completion of a novel study. The kids have chosen their own novels based on their interests and reading levels and there is a whole variety of really creative types of presentations. Groups of kids have selected the same novel and others have chosen a special one of their own. When doing presentations, some join up to work in groups, while others work independently, even though they have read the same novel as others. One group is doing a dramatic presentation of their novel; one student made up a different ending for the novel and is reading his version; one group is doing a "readers' theater," and another group presents a series of paintings to pictorially represent their novel. There is incredible energy and excitement in the room. The kids are all super attentive and are motivated by the presentations of the others. I hear comments like, "I sure want to read that book!"

I'm sitting among the kids, writing comments as they share their presentations. We have together previously decided on the evaluation criteria and the kids are also involved in assessing each other's presentations. They would be using a checklist that I would have prepared for them, based on our criteria. The students wouldn't find this threatening, because the tone would have been set for giving and receiving both positive and constructive comments, and they would have had lots of practice with it. The classroom climate would support choice, active learning and cooperative activities. The whole class would look great to Tammy and it would be great for everyone who was participating!

Brad's Vision

Steaming into the Future

Because I can't seem to choose just one person to join me, I guess I'll invite a team of people. Mrs. Knight, my grade five teacher, whom I have never forgotten because of her warmth and caring, Pat, my university cooperating teacher, who has tremendous energy, enthusiasm, and the ability for curriculum organization and implementation, one of my administrators, whom I like to keep informed of my projects, and perhaps Donna, too, because she is always interested in what I'm doing. Each particular individual would find something worthwhile as they observed my class and maybe they might even learn about something to add to their particular individual strengths.

This specific learning experience would follow a field trip on the local steam train. Actually, this trip is already scheduled for early September. Our classroom would look like the slides that Sylvia showed at her workshop. Student generated displays - both bulletin board materials, and three dimensional materials, - would be all around the room and there would be lots of nooks and crannies for kids to work individually or in groups; however, the room would still be neat and well-organized. The children are excited about their individual projects as they have grown out of their shared experiences on the steam train. Everyone could sense the strong interpersonal relationships that had developed amongst us over the past year. (Remember, I have most of the same kids that I had last year!) As well, the kids are focussed on learning and their collective energy fills the room. groups and individuals are working on a variety of self-chosen projects. One group is making a graph; some kids are writing stories, while others are doing research; another group is making a model of a train; a group of kids is doing a map of the different routes followed by the train. During our trip, one student saw a coyote chasing a deer and, because he's keen on animals, he's pursuing his interest. I'll see if I can tie the research back to the train project later.

As for me, I'm wandering around from group to group, talking with the kids and answering their questions. I have about five kids on my shirt tail at all times, as they all want to tell me what they're doing or ask me questions. I feel needed and I'm really teaching, even though I'm not standing at the front to the room lecturing. I'm also doing assessment with the kids. I have developed the habit of sitting down at the end of the day to write notes about what each child has done during the day. At the end of this day I will have lots to write!

Rachael's Vision

Chasing Butterflies

I would like to have my principal join me in this learning experience to show him what is important to me and to demonstrate to him that learning can happen outside the walls of the school classroom. I'd like to have the same kids for more than one year so I could really get to know them well and then I would continue on with a wonderful butterfly project that we began last year. We hatched butterfly larva and then observed and looked after the butterflies. There were opportunities for literacy, measurement, science, drawing, and all kinds of subject area skills. The kids learned a lot about "life and death" and became quite philosophical about it all. At the end of the year, we let them go free in Bobby's yard, as it's close to the school. Apparently butterflies are not supposed to travel far during their lives. It would be interesting to test out this theory and see how many butterflies we could see around his yard at the end of the summer.

We would begin the year with a field trip to Bobby's to bring back memories from last year and to come up with some potential project ideas for the upcoming year. I also see the kids investigating the outdoors for things other than butterflies. Before we left the classroom, we would talk about all the things we might see and would come up with some questions. I would also want the field trip to be exploratory, so it would stimulate future classroom activities. In preparation for the trip, I would make a flow chart of possible learnings and sketch in the possibilities for the integration of subject area skills - in pencil! This could be revised later depending on the kids' interests. On the field trip, children would be actively engaged in whatever peaked their curiosity. They would have sketch pads and notebooks and would be busy drawing and recording - each off on their own exploration in small groups or even individually. Social relationships can develop more easily in this type of informal setting.

I would be actively involved in the same discoveries with them, asking them questions, responding to their questions, and I guess also asking my own questions. I'd try to remember as many details as possible and then write some anecdotal records about the learning I had observed at the end of the day. The ideal weather would be warm and sunny, just like the kids' sunny smiles of amazement and excitement with learning. My principal would be so impressed with this learning and I would be equally impressed with my kids! We would all be part of a collaborative learning community and I would just be another member of this community - enthusiastically learning alongside them.

The Last Word

I engaged in dialogue with my eight year old nephew Jeremy, sharing with him the visions of the research participants. His comments show an astute recognition that the strength of these teachers lies in their ability to provide students with choices. He seems to understand the power in self-selected learning experiences, and also expresses his belief in the intrinsic nature and personal value of an ongoing learning process for both children and adults. Jeremy says:

> The kids in those stories got to make their own stuff and they all didn't have to do the same thing. They got to work with the guys they wanted to work with. If you have fun at school, then you want to learn and you do better. When I grow up I want to be a teacher and do all the fun stuff with the kids. You get to learn lots of new things from your students, too.

As we continued our conversation I was reminded of a lecture by Dr. Elliot Eisner at the University of Lethbridge in January, 1989. He presented his vision of enlightened approaches to educational research, curriculum development and evaluation. He stressed the importance of pluralistic perspectives through which educators can provide meaningful opportunities for their students to learn prescribed curriculum content within optimal growth environments. While his eloquent words could provide an appropriate quotation to close my study, perhaps it is more refreshing to listen to the identical message from an eight year old. Jeremy reveals an intuitive understanding that teachers can make pedagogical improvements if they are willing to change. With childlike wisdom he delivers an important reflection for the consideration of developing teachers as they construct meaning through professional learning.

> There are some things that kids **want** to do in school, 'cuz they're fun, and there are some things that you **should** do in school, 'cuz they will pay off later. It's fun to give reports to the other kids, and to make things, and to go on nature field trips. But, you should learn how to do math so you can shop in stores, and how to read so you know about danger signs, and how to write so you can write letters to your grandparents. But teachers need to make it fun so you want to learn the stuff you should learn, like learning math from computer games or from adding up how many animals you see on a field trip. You learn better doing stuff than just learning from a book.
>
> Jeremy, June, 1993

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APPENDIX I

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY
offered by DONNA MORRISON for September, 1991

Are you interested in helping me with my research study? Perhaps?....
I am exploring the ways in which teachers change their teaching practices through professional development opportunities. The three or four elementary school teachers selected for involvement in this study will meet as a group to share stories of their classroom teaching experiences, as they explore the learnings they gained during this workshop. They will talk together about their own teaching in the development of program continuity and other curriculum policies. The following questions may help you decide if you would like to be part of my study:

KNOWLEDGE:
Have you gained in your understanding of the ideas, facts, and concepts involved with the Project Approach and your understanding of how this integrative approach relates to the Program Continuity Policy?

SKILLS:
Have you developed new teaching skills that can be employed in your classroom?

DISPOSITIONS:
Are you interested in trying out new ideas to facilitate children's learning?
Are you curious about your learning process?
Do you like to share teaching ideas with others and listen to their ideas?

FEELINGS:
Do you feel competent about your ability to communicate with others?
Do you feel competent in your ability to be reflective about your own teaching?
Do you view change as a positive aspect of personal growth?

If you answered yes to some of these questions, you are the type of teacher who would enjoy working with me in this research project.....and you are the type of teacher that I would like to include in my study! However, are you able to make the commitments that would be required?

TEACHER'S RESPONSIBILITY	RESEACHER'S RESPONSIBILITY
Keep a Teacher Journal of teaching experiences by recording classroom anecdotes and stories and reflecting on personal teaching/learning.	Respond in writing to the teacher's journal each week.
Meet with the other teachers in the study once every 3 weeks over a 6 month period (8 sessions) to share classroom stories, to the talk about personal discoveries, and to give and receive feedback from the others.	Participate with teachers in these sessions by facilitating the discussion groups.
Share with the researcher both teaching plans and the project work done by the students. Meet with researcher periodically for individual conversations.	Make comments as appropriate. Respond helpfully to teachers.

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING FORM AND RETURN TO ME:

NAME: ______________________________

ADDRESS: ______________________________

SCHOOL: ______________________________

ADDRESS: ______________________________

HOME PHONE: ______________ SCHOOL PHONE: ______________

GRADE LEVEL (SEPT. '91): ______________________________

Please check one or more of the following statements, as relevant for you:

____ I am interested and would like to participate because....

____ I would consider participating under these conditions.....

____ I would consider participating, but first I need to know more about...

____ I think this sounds interesting, but it's not possible for me because...

____ I am not interested in participating in this research project because...

____ I am simply not interested .... no particular reason!

Other comments.......

APPENDIX II

PROJECT APPROACH WORKSHOP HANDOUT

THE PROJECT APPROACH IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

A. Criteria for the Selection of a Topic

How does a study of this topic....

a) build on what children already know?
b) help children make better sense of the world they live in?
c) recognize and value literacy and numeracy in real life contexts?
d) offer children ideas for dramatic play?
e) encourage children to seek information sources outside school?
f) facilitate communication with parents?

B. Phases in the Life of a Project

Phase I. INTRODUCTION - Getting started with memories

1. Find out the children's current understanding
2. Review or introduce basic information
3. Stimulate interest in the topic
4. Note individual special interests or experience
5. Involve parents and families

Phase II. DEVELOPMENT - The project in progress

1. Give children new experiences and information
2. Maintain and extend interest
3. Set expectations and enable children to be independent
4. Respond to varying needs
5. Reflect on the progress of the project
6. Encourage children to talk about the project at home

Phase III REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS - Finishing the project

1. Consolidate new learning
2. Encourage celebration of ideas
3. Arrange a culminating event
4. Review and evaluate achievements
5. Speculate on further questions
6. Lead into the next project

C. Distinctions between Systematic Instruction and Project Work

SYSTEMATIC INSTRUCTION	PROJECT WORK
1. For acquiring skills	1. For applying skills
2. Activity at instructional level	2. Activity at independent level
3. Teacher direction	3. Teacher guidance
4. Child follows instructions	4. Child chooses

Both of these are essential aspects of a well balanced curriculum

Sylvia C. Chard (1990) University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada